Annamalai University Historical Series No: 8

BUDDHISM IN KERALA

BY

P. C. ALEXANDER, M. A., D. Litt.,
Professor of History & Economics,
SREE NARAYANA COLLEGE, QUILON.

PUBLISHED BY

THE REGISTRAR, ANNAMALAI UNIVERSITY,
ANNAMALAINAGAR.

1949

Thesis approved for the
Degree of Doctor of Letters of the
Annamalai University, 1946,

PRINTED AT THE NATIONAL PRINTERS & TRADERS LIMITED,
CHIDAMBARAM, QH. SA, 69, BKS, 300, 27-8-'49.

PREFACE

THE subject of this thesis was suggested to me by my esteemed friend Prof. R. Sathianathier. I began working for this thesis in 1943, while I was on the staff of the Annamalai University, under the able guidance of Diwan Bahadur Prof. C. S. Srinivasachari. It was completed in 1946 and approved for the D. Litt degree of the University. I had the good fortune of having the guidance of two veteran Professors of History—Prof: C. S. Srinivasachari and Prof: R. Sathianathier—and I am deeply indebted to them for their valuable help. I am grateful to the authorities of the Annamalai University for sanctioning the publication of this thesis.

I am sorry, some errors occur in this thesis as a result of hasty proof-reading.

I am thankful to the National Printers and Traders Limited, Chidambaram for finishing the printing work promptly and neatly.

P. C. ALEXANDER.

ABBREVIATIONS

Pr.O.C.	....	Proceedings of the Oriental Conference.
T.A.S.	....	Travancore Archælogical Series.
M.M.D.	....	Manual of the Malabar District.
I.A.	....	Indian Antiquary.
R.E.	....	Rock Edict.
H. of K.	....	History of Kerala.
J.R.A.S.	....	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.
J.I.H.	....	Journal of Indian History.
J.C.P.	....	Syrian Copper Plate.
J·C.P.	....	Jewish Copper Plate.

ERRATA

Page.	Line.	For		Read,
48	2	carrys	....	carry.
61	6	Sgitaeparn	....	Separating.
64 note		Appendix III	....	Appendix II.
66	18	found	....	founded.
87	26	other	....	others.
88	13	them	....	then
95	28	brodered	....	bordered.
96	4	Chandanadu	....	Chandanadri.
103	4	proceeds	....	precedes.
105	26	unaltered	....	unlettered.
105	27	this	....	his.
114 note		Aiynppn	....	Aiyappan.
120 note		peassantry	....	peasantry.
126	1	encouragde	....	encouraged.
126	30	setting	....	settling.
128	17	practiced	....	practised.
132	6	beatel	....	betel.
135	24	through	....	throw.
138	1	occurence	....	occurrence.
139	11	diffent	....	different.
153	27	epic	....	epics.
163	18	Buddhists	....	Buddhist.
164	18	accomodate	....	accommodate.
167 note		Buddehists	....	Buddhists.
168 note		Mahabodt	....	Mahabodhi.
169	5	familier	....	familiar.
175	2	questoin	....	question.
176	32	become	....	became.
179	25	the Buddhism	....	Buddhism.
182	9	led	....	fled.
189	17	from	....	form.
194	20	by a	....	by.
196 note		features	....	feature.
196 note		Vicher	....	Visscher.
198	3	institution	....	institutions.
201	12	graet	....	great.
204	14	Vaikaran or	....	Vaikara nor.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.

THE most serious difficulty a student of history has to face while attempting to dig into the distant past of Kerala is the paucity of archaeological and literary evidences. The difficulty is all the more formidable for one who attempts to study the history of Buddhism in the country. With the exception of a handful of recent converts, there are no followers of the Sakyamuni in any part of Kerala and so one cannot come across even popular traditions or legends which may be helpful for this study. Kerala has not produced any *Dvipavamsa* or *Mahavamsa*; and one finds one has to depend mainly on the scanty references in literature and the few Buddhist vestiges which lie scattered in the different parts of the country.

The literary sources may be mainly classified into two, indigenous and foreign. The former consist chiefly of Tamil and Malayalam works. Occasionally one comes across some useful references in Sanskrit works also.

An important point which must be emphasised at the very outset is the cultural and linguistic unity of ancient 'Tamilakam' constituted by the Chera, Chola and Pandya kingdoms. A proper appreciation of this point is indispensable for the study of the history of any cultural or religious movement in any one of these regions. These three kingdoms were no doubt politically distinct and independent entities, but the political walls within Tamilakam were no barriers for the free action and interaction of cultural or religious ideas. In fact there was even a feeling of geographical unity in ancient Tamilakam as is clearly exemplified by some of the

statements in the Tamil classics of this period. The *Tolkappiyam*[1] the oldest extant Tamil work, in one of its sutrams refers to the Tamil country as one belonging to "the famous three within the four boundaries." The "four boundaries" of "the famous three" are explained by the commentator Perasiriyar as Venkatam (The Tirupati hills) in the north, Kumari in the south and the seas on the east and the west. Panambarnar the class-mate of Tolkappiyar who has written a preface to the *Tolkappiyam* refers only to the northern and southern boundaries of Tamilakam.[2] Similarly the author of the *Silappadikaram*[3] also leaves out the east and the west while enumerating the boundaries of Tamilakam. The absence of any special mention of the eastern and western boundaries is explained on the ground that they were the seas. The *Purananuru* also refers to Tamilakam as one geographical unit bound by the seas on the east and the west with Venkatam as the northern boundary and Kumari as the southern.[4]

It must be remembered that when we examine the Tamil literature as a source for the ancient history of Kerala we are examining the literature of ancient Kerala itself and not tapping a foreign source. Among the three crowned heads of Tamilakam the Chera king stands pre-eminent. In fact the Cheras

---

1. *Tolkappiyam Poruladikaram Seyyuliyal No. 79.*
"வண்புகழ் மூவர் தண்பொழில் வரைப்பின்
நாற்பெய ரெல்லையகம்."

2. "வடவேங்கடம் தென்குமரியாயிடை
தமிழ் கூறு நல்லுலகம்."
— பனம்பாரனார்.

3. "நெடியோன் குன்றமும் தொடியோன் பௌவமும்
தமிழ்வரம்பறுத்த தண்புன னன்னாடு."
— சிலப்பதிகாரம்-வேனிற்காதை 2.

4. "தென்குமரிவட பெருங்கல்
குணகுடல் கடலாவெல்லை."

are invariably mentioned first among the Tamil kings. As Prof. M. Raghava Aiyangar observes the wide expanse of the Kerala country, the fertility of its soil, the heroism of its warriors and the far-famed munificence of its monarchs obviously entitled the Cheras to this pride of place.[1]

Tamil was the language of the 'Muvarasars' or the three kings of Tamilakam. While 'Centamil' was fully developed in Madura and to some extent, in the territory ruled by the Pandyas, 'Kotumtamil'—the original spoken Tamil from which the literary language was evolved—prevailed in the other regions of Tamilnadu. The territory of the Cholas came under the influence of Centamil soon, but that of the Cheras tarried behind. Still the early Chera rulers were as eager to develop Centamil as the Pandyas themselves. Even a casual examination of the ancient Tamil literature will convince anyone of the pre-eminent position occupied by the Cheras in the life of ancient Tamilnadu. Generally the credit for the patronage of Tamil goes to the Pandyas, but it is particularly noteworthy that the Sangam verses about the Chera kings are far greater in number than those relating to the Cholas or Pandyas.[2] Unfortunately there is a tendency among some Malayalam writers to ignore or underrate the Tamil heritage of Kerala. In their enthusiasm to uphold the claims of Malayalam to prominence they are prepared even to ignore the great contribution which ancient Kerala had made towards the development of the Tamil language and literature. Several poets of the Sangam age like Kumattur Kannanar, Palai Gautamanar, Kappiyattu Kappiyanar,

---

1. *Ceravendar Ceyyutkovai.* Preface P. 1.

2. *Ibid* P. 2.

Paranar, Kakkaippatiniyar, Naccellaiyar, Kapilar, Arasilkilar, and Perumkunturkilar were honoured with handsome rewards by the Chera princes.[1] They were not only great patrons of Tamil literature, but were great poets and composers themselves. The Chera princes like Ilango Adikal and Palai Patiya Perumkadumko rank among the greatest poets of Tamilnadu. Some of the finest flowers of Tamil literature have come from Cheranadu. It was there that the famous *Padirrupattu* and the *Silappadikaram* saw the light. Sattanar the author of the immortal *Manimekalai* was a great friend of Chenguttuvan the Chera ruler and his brother Ilango. He spent a considerable part of his time at the Chera capital which was then the abode of many Tamil poets like him. The *Purapporul—Venbamalai*, the Tamil Grammar assigned to the 7th or 8th century A. D., the *Perumal Tirumoli* of Kulasekhara Alwar (C:600-800 A.D.) Sundaramurthi Nayanar's *Thevarappadikam* and his friend Cheraman Perumal's *Ponvannattantati* and *Adi ula* (C. 9th century) sprang from the Chera country.[2] These facts are ample evidences to show the great heights to which the Tamil literature reached under the patronage of the Chera kings. In fact Tamil was known to the European scholars as the language of Malabar for a very long time. Fabricius who compiled a Tamil Dictionary in the 18th century styled it as "The Dictionary of Malabar and English wherein the words and phrases of the Tamilian language commonly called by the Europeans the Malabar language are explained in English." Orme the Historian of India styles

1. Pr: O. C. 1939.Presidential address by Oolloor S. Parameswara Iyer. P. 1248.

2. Raja Sir. Annamalai Chettiar commemoration volume. Article entitled 'Ceranadu & Tamil' by Vidwan S. Arumugha Muldaliar. P.137.

the Tamil language as 'Malabaresa'. The Tamil language was so closely associated with the people of Malabar in ancient times that the language itself came to be called after the name of the country.[1] It is also important to note that most of the inscriptions discovered in Kerala belonging to the ancient period are in Tamil even though the script in some of them is "Vatteluthu". Even the copper plates given by Bhaskara Ravi Varman to the Jews are in Tamil. From all that we have stated above we can safely conclude that Tamil was the language of ancient Kerala, particularly during the period which witnessed the rise and fall of Buddhism there.

The most important works among the Tamil classics which throw light on ancient Kerala are the *Purananuru*, the *Ahananuru*, the *Padirruppattu*, the *Silappadikarm* the *Manimekalai* and a few lyrics of the *Narrinai*. Of these, the *Purananuru*, the *Ahananuru* and the *Narrinai* are not useful for our present purpose.[2] The *Padirupatu*,[3] though not of any direct help for the study of Buddhism, is very useful for understanding the political and social conditions of the Chera country when Buddhism flourished there. Among the ancient Tamil

1. These references may be explained by some as the result of confounding Malabar with Ma'abar.

2. These three works are included in the collections known as the *Ettutogai* or the eight Anthologies. The *Purananuru* (otherwise known as *Puruppattu* or *Puram*) contains 400 heroic poems describing the achievements of many princes, warriors and poets. It gives a good picture of the heroism and warlike deeds of the ancient Tamils. The *Ahananuru* (otherwise known as the *Nedumpogai* or *Aham*) contains 400 stanzas dealing mainly with the subject of love. As many as 145 poets are said to have contributed to the collection. The *Narrinai* contains 401 verses from the hands of as many as 175 poets and deals with the themes like pastoral tracts, river, valleys, desert, sea coast etc.

3. The *Padirruppattu* in its present form contains only 80 poems. These are in praise of eight Chera kings. 20 poems out of the "Ten Tens" are believed to have been lost.

classics the most useful books for the study of Buddhism in Kerala are the *Silappadikaram* and the *Manimekalai.* The heyday of Buddhism in South India is marked by the age of these twin epics. These two works deal with one story continuously and are considered to be together constituting one epic. Since we will be making constant references in this thesis to the various incidents and scenes described in these two works, their subject matter may be briefly referred to here. The *Silappadikaram*. (The Lay of Anklet) written by Ilango Adikal a prince of the Chera ruling house deals with the story of Kovalan the merchant and his chaste wife Kannaki. Kovalan impoverished by his infatuation for a courtesan, Madhavi, still enjoys the devotion of his wife and migrates with the latter from his native town of Kaveri Pattinam to Madura. There he is unjustly accused of the theft of a jewelled anklet belonging to the Pandyan queen and sentenced to execution by the thoughtless ruler. His death was followed by the immolation of his chaste wife Kannaki whose spirit ascended to heaven. In commemoration of her chastity the Chera ruler Chenguttuvan built a temple at his capital. The epic ends with the death of the Pandyan king and queen in remorse for ordering the execution of Kovalan for a false charge, the destruction by fire of the city of Madura. as a result of the curse of the chaste Kannaki, and her deification as the Goddess of Chastity.

The *Manimekalai* written by Kulavanigan Sattanar close friend and collaborator of Ilango Adikal continues and completes the story of the *Silappadikaram*. It narrates the further incidents connected with the life of Madhavi the courtesan and her daughter Manimekalai. Manimekalai was instructed in the various truths expounded by the teachers of the different faiths prevailing in the

land. She finally embraced the Buddha Dharma and became a disciple of Aravana Adikal (a noted Buddhist teacher of Kanchi).

The *Manimekalai* is saturated with Buddhistic sentiments from beginning to end and is the most helpful source of information for our study. Cantos 26 and 27 of the *Manimekalai* are of particular importance to our discussion as they contain detailed descriptions of the various religious systems which prevailed at Vanji the Chera capital. The references to the Buddhists and the Buddhist Viharas of Vanji in these cantos are very helpful for estimating the extent of Buddhistic influence in the country. Cantos 29 and 30 of the *Manimekalai* are useful for understanding what type of Buddhism was in vogue in that period. But in treating the *Manimekalai* as a source for history one should not forget the fact that it is a poem first and foremost. Whatever subject it deals with is treated poetically. As an epic poem it sets before itself the didactic purpose of enforcing the superiority of Buddhism over other religions. "Nevertheless the poem could contain and does contain much that may be considered historical provided the material is used on principles of sound criticism."[1]

The *Silappadikaram* treated as an epic separate from the *Manimekalai* is not so useful for the study of Buddhism in Kerala as the *Manimekalai*. The references to Buddhism which can be gleaned from the *Silappadikaram* are very few; but this is because its twin the *Manimekalai* gives a full treatment of the subject. In making use of the *Silappadikaram* as a source of information for our subject we have to treat it as constituting one epic along with the *Manimekalai*. (See Ch. II of this thesis)

1. Manimekalai in its historical setting S. Krishnaswamy Iyengar, P. 13

For a study of the decline of Buddhism in the country the *Tevaram hymns* of the three Saiva saints, (C. 7th-9th cent.) Sambandar, Appar and Sundarar, the *Tiruvachakam* of Manickkavachakar (C. 9th Cent. A. D.) and the *Nalaiyara Prabandam (Divyaprabandam)* of the Vaishnava Alwars like Nammalwar, Tirumangai Alwar, Kulasekhara Alwar and others are very useful.[1]

Now we shall turn to Malayalam literature. Malayalam is of comparatively recent origin and as such will not be of as much use as Tamil for our purpose. We have yet to come across a pure Malayalam work which can be placed before the 13th century. The oldest poem in Malayalam is *Ramachritam* (C. 13th century);[2] but it must be pointed out that it savours more of Tamil than Malayalam.[3] The earliest inscriptions where the Malayalam language is used are the Attur copper plates of South Travancore assigned to the year 1251.[4] Mahakavi Oolloor. S. Parameswara Iyer, one of the greatest living authorities on Malayalam, says that the history of

---

1. The *Tevaram hymns* consist of seven books, three by Sambandar three by Appar and one by Sundarar. They were systematically arranged by Nambi Andar Nambi (C. 975—1035 A. D.). This collection is known as *Muvar Adangan Murai.*

The *Tiruvachakam* or the holy utterance of the Saiva Saint Manickka vachakar (he of jewel-like words) is said to have been first recited in the sacred temple of Chidambaram. There is another work by the saint called *Tiruccitrambalakkovai* which is also said to have been composed in honour of that shrine.

The *Nalaiyara Prabandam* of the Alwars stands on the same footing of sanctity as the *Tirumurai* collection of the Saiva saints. The four Prabandhas of Nammalwar are the *Tiruviruttam,* the *Tiruvasiriyam,* the *Periyatiruvandadhi* and the *Tiruvaymoli.* The poems of Tirumangai Alwar are of a highly philosophical type and they form a supplement as it were of the four Prabandhas of Nammalwar.

2. *Prachina Malayala Mathrukakal* by Oollur. See preface.

3. Mr. K. G. Sesha Iyer, Mr. T. A. Gopinatha Rao and others consider it to be a Tamil work.

4. T. A. S. Vol. IV. P.P. 86-88.

Malayalam as a separate language can be traced back to the 6th century; [1] but even if this is to be accepted as correct, it must be admitted that the language was only in its infancy. In fact the earliest work relating to grammar and poetics in Malayalam—the *Lilathilakam,*—is assignable only to the 14th century, a period when Malayalam was struggling out of its swaddling clothes.

The modern period in Malayalam commences with the advent of Tunjattu Ramanjan Eluthachen who has been assigned to the middle of the 17th century A. D. He is believed by some to be the author of the *Keralolpathi* the earliest traditional account of Kerala. The *Keralolpathi* attempts to trace the history of Kerala from the days of Parasu Rama the legendary hero of Kerala. It gives the stories of Bana Perumal and Cheraman Perumal who are said to have embraced the Bauddha margam and gone to Mecca.(?) It also refers to Sankaracharya and Kumarila Bhatta the two great champions of the Vedic religion. It gives descriptive accounts about the administration of Kerala by the "Raksha-Purushanmar" and the Perumals. If the statements in the *Keralolpathi* had been reliable the *Keralolpathi* would have been very useful for our present study. But it is impossible to give credance to the accounts given in the *Keralolpathi*[1]. No historian has so far accepted the *Keralolpathi* as either reliable or resonable. On the other hand it has been the subject of scathing criticism at the hands of everyone who has taken up the study of Kerala history. Mr. K. P. Padmanabha Menon says that "in its present garb it is either

---

1. Pr. O. C. 9th Session. P.P. 1253.

2. There are different editions of the *Keralolpathi* and notable differences in different editions. We have made use of the "Mangalore Edition" for purposes of this thesis.

full of anachronisms, absurdities and contradictions or is an illdigested and uncollated collection of different versions huddled together in inextricable confusion."[1] Mr. Logan describes it as "a farrago of legendary nonsense". Mr K. G. Sesha Iyer says that "to glean history from this work is as hopeless as to seek for a needle in a haystack."[2] Mr. Oolloor. S. Parameswara Iyer is of opinion that the *Keralolpathi* is a fable from beginning to end. He says that it contains very few propositions which are of use to historians[3]. One great difficulty in dealing with the *Keralolpathi* is that there are many versions of the book. We do not know when exactly the *Keralolpathi* was committed to writing. It is quite possible that the story of the *Keralolpathi* was handed from one generation to another in the form of oral tradition. Later it must have been committed to writing at the orders of different ruling chieftains in Kerala. The authors being different, we find differences in language and in some cases even in matter. Some scholars think that it is the work of a single author and they attribute it to Eluthachen. The author of the *Keralolpathi*, whoever he was, had little respect for historical accuracy. He took great liberties with chronology and presented facts and personalities according to his own wild imagination. No more example will be necessary to prove the absurd lengths to which the author of the *Keralolpathi* took liberties with facts of history than the statement in the *Keralolpathi* that Cheraman Perumal prepared for a war

1. History of Kerala Vol. I P. 452.

2. Cera kings of the Sangam period. P. 77

3. Foreword in Malayalam by Oolloor to the Malayalam book *Chengannoor Kshetra Mahatmyam* by Kalloor Narayana Pillai. P. 10.

with Krishna Devaraya of the Vijayanagar dynasty who lived at least eight centuries after him! Obviously Eluthachan (if he is to be accepted as the author of the *Keralolpathi*) was a very poor historian. In spite of all its defects the *Keralolpathi* need not be entirely dismissed as unhelpful. Even Mr. Logan has admitted that historically there is something to be learnt from it.[1] The accounts it gives of the social and political organisation of the people in the ancient period and the references it makes to Buddhism are particularly useful. But one must take care to avoid the confusions of its author. Historical facts have to be carefully extricated from the confusing webs of legends which the author has woven round them.

Some of the famous folk songs of the north, popularly called as "Vatakkan Pattukal" are helpful in our study as they throw some light on the theory on Ilava immigration into Kerala from Ceylon.

It is a pity that in dealing with the history of Buddhism in Kerala Malayalam literature is of little help to the research worker. As we have already stated it is because of the fact that when Buddhism flourished in Kerala Malayalam was not the court language of the country. Malayalam literature will be of little help to research workers who try to explore the history of Kerala before the 10th century.

There is a Sanskrit work called *Kerala Mahatmyam* which contains some references to Buddhism in Kerala. It gives the story of a king by name Nasanga who is said to have become a Buddhist. But as a historical treatise the *Kerala Mahatmyam* is no better

---

1. M.M.D. P. 224.

useful for our study. There are no edicts or inscriptions of considerable antiquity. From the *Manimekalai* and other literary works we gather that there were numerous Buddhist Viharas and Chaityas in ancient Cheranadu. But unfortunately there are no vestiges of this kind in any part of Kerala. Probably the Buddhist Viharas must have been replaced by or converted into Hindu temples. Similarly many of the ancient images of the Buddha too must have been altered and converted into the images of Hindu Gods. Still we have come across nearly seven images of the Buddha in the different parts of the country. Some of them have been discovered earlier by Mr. Gopinatha Rao while some are brought to light for the first time in this thesis. Only one inscription has been discovered in the whole of Kerala which makes a direct reference to Buddhism. This is the inscription of king Varaguna of South Travancore assigned to the 9th century A. D. The importance of this inscription to the study of Buddhism in Kerala can hardly be exaggerated.

In dealing with some topics, some popular traditions and local legends too have been taken into account. Special care has been taken in selecting only those traditions which serve to corroborate facts which have real basis in history.

CHAPTER I

THE SPREAD OF BUDDHISM IN KERALA DURING THE CENTURIES PRECEDING THE CHRISTIAN ERA.

"THE history of Buddhism in South India is still wrapped in considerable obscurity. We have no means of knowing when and by what particular agency or means it got promulgated in this part of India."—so observes Dr. S. Krishnaswamy Iyengar, referring to the spread of Buddhism in South India. When there is so much of obscurity about the history of Buddhism in the South, one need not be surprised at the obscurity about the fortunes of Buddhism in Kerala in particular. In fact there are very few genuine evidences to show when and how Buddhism spread in Kerala. However we shall attempt to piece together the various evidences which we find scattered in ancient literature and inscriptions. One important point should be emphasised in this connection. Whatever might have been the age and agency for the spread of Buddhism in Kerala, these could not have been quite different from those of Tamilnadu. The bonds of ancient Kerala with her neighbouring Tamil regions were so strong that any religious or cultural movement which affected the latter was bound to have its reactions in Kerala. It would be puerile to argue that Kerala on the western side of the Sahya hills was unruffled by the changes in the religious life of her Tamil neighbours. Tamilakam in the ancient period was one cultural

1. Article entitled "Buddhism in Manimekalai" in "Buddhistic studies" (B. C. Law) Page 1.

entity and no part of it could afford to stand aloof unaffected by the movements which swept the whole country. Buddhism was one such movement which enveloped the entire Tamilakam and it would not be wrong to conclude that it spread in Kerala more or less by the same means and at the same time as it did in the Chola and Pandya countries.

For examining how and to what extent Buddhism spread in Kerala during the centuries preceding the Christian era, the most helpful way would be to study the literature of the country during this period.

It is very significant that the important Tamil classics of the early period do not make any reference to the prevalence of Buddhism in the country. The *Tolkappiyam*, the earliest grammatical work in Tamil which is generally assigned to the 4th century B. C. does not make even a side reference to Buddhism.[1] Similarly the *Tirukkural* of Tiruvalluvar which is assigned to a period two or three centuries later than the *Tolkappiyam*

---

1. The *Tolkappiyam* whose author was known as Tolkappiyar was the Grammatical basis of the literary works of the second and third Academies (Sangams) It is divided into three books dealing respectively with phonology with accidence and syntax and with war and love, prosody etc. The first two parts are instructive from the linguistic and the philological points of view as revealing the conditions of the Tamil language at the time while the third section gives us glimpses of the political, social and religious life of the people. The work has been commented upon by several notable commentators like- Ilampuranar, Naccinarkiniyar and Senavaraiyar.

also makes no mention of Buddhism.[1] There are some scholars who interpret some terms and expressions of the *Kural* as pertaining to the creed of the Buddha. It is even claimed that Tiruvalluvar was a Buddhist by conviction. This conclusion is mainly drawn from the section entitled 'Turavu' the ten couplets commencing from the Kural Venba 341. The substance of these ten *Kurals* is that renunciation is the cure for all ills and therefore one should aim at it. But one finds it difficult to understand how the concept of renunciation can be claimed to be exclusively a Buddhistic doctrine.

On the whole, there are few evidences to prove the wide prevalence of Buddhism in the South during this period. At least Buddhism had not become a potent factor influencing the life of the people at large. Perhaps stray members of the sect might have lived here and there in the capital cities of the Tamil kingdoms with no regular establishment or organisation. The absence of any reference to Buddhism in the literature of the country during this period is not the only argument in support of this view. A more positive evidence may be given. There was an assemblage of eminent Buddhist divines in Ceylon in the second century B. C. from various Buddhist centres on the occasion of the consecration of

1. The date of the *Kural* is a disputed point. Some scholars even assign it to the early centuries of the Christian era. But it is generally accepted to be a work of the pre-Christian era.

The *Kural* is popularly known as *Muppal* (literally Trivarga) and deals with the three objects of life-Dharma, Artha and Kama; the fourth *viz* Moksha does not lend itself to didactic treatment and has been indicated in the last four chapters of the section on *Dharma*. The work consists of 133 chapters each containing ten Kural Venbas or couplets. *Dharma* has been treated in all the four stages, *viz.*, of student, householder, a retired life and that of the hermit. It is supplemented with a chapter on pre-destination. The attempts of some writers to find Buddhistic principles in these chapters are quite unwarranted. The treatment of Dharma in the Kural is certainly not from the Buddhistic point of view.

the Mahavihara in the reign of King Duttagamani Abaya. Invitations were issued to all Buddhist centres of reputation. Monks who assembled for this ceremony included not only the "bikkus" of Ceylon, but also large numbers of others from the principal Viharas and monasteries of India.[1] The function was so very important that representatives from even 'Alasanda the city of the Yonas' came over to Ceylon to attend it. But in the list of places mentioned Kerala is not to be found. If Buddhism in Kerala had reached that degree of celebrity attained by the other centres certainly Buddhist divines from that country would have been invited to this function. The omission of Kerala indicates that Buddhism in Kerala had not reached any

---

1. The following are the names of some of the notable Buddhist divines who were present on that occasion (History of the Sinhalese—J. M. Senavartana Vol; II P. 16.)

Candagutta Maha Thera.—From the Vanavasa country (Modern Banavasi in Canara)'

Cittagutta Maha Thera—From the Bodhimanda Vihara at Bodhgaya the place where Gautama attained to Buddhahood).

Dharma Sena Maha Thera.—From Isipatanarama (near Baranasi the modern Benares—where the Buddha preached his first sermon).

Indagutta Maha Thera.—From Rajagaha (now Rajgir) the capital of Magadha.

Mahadeva Maha Thera.—From Pallavabhogga.

Mittinna Maha Thera.—From the Asokarama in Pupphapura (Patali putra).

Piyadassi Maha Thera.—From the Jatavanarama (a monastery near Savatthi in the Kosala country).

Suryagutta Maha Thera.—From Kelasa Vihara.

Urudhamma — Rakkhita Maha Thera —From the Gositarama in Kosambi (on the River Jamuna).

Urusamgha—Rakkhita Maha Thera—From the Dakkhinagiri in Ujjeni (now Ujjain in the Gwalior State, Central India).

Uttara Maha Thera—From the Vattaniyarama in the Vinjha forest (near the Vindhya mountain.)

Uttina Maha Thera—From the Kasmira country.

Yonamahadhamma — Rakkhita Maha Thera — From Alasanda (Alexandria) the city of the Yonas, *i.e.*, Greeks.

respectable degree of prominence. It may be suggested that the omission of Kerala indicates that Kerala Buddhism was something distinct—distinct to the point of hostility—from the Buddhism that prevailed in Northern India and Ceylon. But facts do not warrant such an inference. On the other hand we will be presently showing that there was close contact between South India and Ceylon during this period. In fact some Buddhist centres in South India were represented in this assembly at Ceylon. Banavasi in North Canara is one of the names mentioned. Another place mentioned is Pallavabhogga which may be identified with the Pallava country. If Buddhists from Banavasi and the Pallava country were not considered hostile, how can we say that those from Kerala alone were considered so. The obvious conclusion is that Buddhism in Kerala was not so prominent as that of the other centres mentioned in this list.

A relevant question which must be answered at this juncture is, how was Buddhism first introduced into the country. We have stated that Buddhism in Kerala was in its infant stages during the centuries preceding the Christian era. Nevertheless we have to explain how this religion was first introduced into the country.

Some scholars are disposed to think that the propaganda for Buddhism in South India was not due to anything that Asoka did. South Indian Buddhism, they think, had little to do with Asoka's propaganda. They argue that if Buddhism had been introduced into this region by the efforts of Asoka's missionaries there would have been some reference to it in the literature of the country. But it is pointed out that even "the *Manimekalai* a professed Buddhist work written by a Buddhist

author for the actual glorification of Buddhism referring to the more important Buddhist centres in Tamil India and to the monuments therein has not referred to Asoka in any one place."[1] It is a fact that there is absolutely no reference to Asoka in the *Manimekalai* while there are innumerable references to northern rulers and to northern saints. But the absence of any reference to Asoka in the *Manimekalai* cannot be accepted as a serious argument in support of the contention that South Indian Buddhism had nothing to do with Asoka. It must be remembered that the *Manimekalai* was composed many centuries after Asoka's time. There is no occasion in the epic to refer to the history of the spread of Buddhism in the country and therefore the absence of any reference to Asoka need not be very surprising. The statement that South Indian traditions do not give any evidence of any connection with Asoka[2] does not seem to be wholly acceptable. Mention must be made here of the traditions about Asoka referred to by the Chinese Traveller Yuan Chwang when he gives his account of " Malakuta ". He speaks of the remains of an old monastery built by Asoka's brother Mahendra on the east side of the capital and the tope built by Asoka to perpetuate the memory of the Buddha. It is needless to say that the monastery and the tope to which the pilgrim makes reference were only fictitious and legendary, but it must be remembered that the pilgrim would not have spoken of these with great show of accuracy if there had been absolutely no traditions connecting the name of Asoka or Mahendra with the country.

1. Dr. S. K. Iyengar's article on "Buddhism in Manimekalai" in Buddhistic studies by B.C. Law, Page 1.

2. Ibid.

It may be argued that Kerala or any of the South Indian kingdoms is not mentioned in the list of places to which Asoka sent missionaries and therefore the introduction of Buddhism in these places could not have been by Asoka's agents. According to Buddhist traditions various missions were sent to distant countries for the propagation of Buddhism as a result of a council held under the auspices of Asoka. *The Maha Vamsa* gives the list of these places with the names of the "theras" sent to them respectively.[1] In fact in this list of places the southernmost region mentioned is "Vanavasa" (the Banavasi country). The only other possibility of a South Indian kingdom is Mahishamandala which may be identified with Mysore.[2] But here again, the absence of any mention of South Indian kingdoms in this list cannot be taken by itself to be a sound argument in support of the theory that Buddhism was introduced into these regions by agencies other than those of Asoka. We shall now examine the famous edicts of Asoka and see what light they throw on this problem. There is only one Asokan

---

1. Maha Vamsa (Geiger's translation, Chapter XII, P. 82)—"When the thera Moggaliputta the illuminator of the religion of the conqueror had brought the (third) council to an end and when looking into the future he had beheld the founding of the religion in adjacent countries (then) in the month of Kattika he sent forth theras one here and one there. The thera Majjhantika he sent to Kasmira and Gandhara, the thera Mahadeva he sent to Mahishamandala. To Vanavasa he sent the thera named Rakkhita and to Aparantaka the yona named Dammarakkhitato; Maharattha (he sent) the thera named Mahadamma Rakkhita, but the thera Maharakhita he sent into the country of Yona. He sent the thera Majjhima to the Himalaya country and to Suvannabhumi he sent the two theras Sona and Uttara. The great thera Mahinda the theras Itthiya, Uttiya, Sambala and Bhaddasala his disciples, these five theras he sent forth with the charge. "Ye shall found in the lovely island of Lanka the lovely religion of the conqueror".

2. 'Beginnings of South Indian History,' by Dr. S. K. Iyengar. PP. 74—77.

edict which makes a direct reference to Kerala and that is R.E. No. II. It says :—[1]

"Everywhere within the dominion of His Sacred and Gracious Majesty the King and likewise among the frontages such as the Cholas, Pandyas, the Satiyaputra, the *Keralaputra*, what is (known as) Tamraparni, the Greek King Antiochus and those kings too who are the neighbours of that Antiochus everywhere have been instituted by His Sacred and Gracious Majesty two kinds of medical treatment—medical treatment of man and medical treatment of beast. Medicinal herbs also, those wholesome for man and wholesome for beast have been caused to be imported and to be planted in all places wherever they did not exist. Roots also have been caused to be imported and to be planted everywhere wherever they did not exist. On the roads wells also have been caused to be dug and trees caused to be planted for the enjoyment of man and beast."

Six copies of this edict have been discovered at different places in India. They are Girnar in the Junagarh state (Kathiawar Peninsula), Kalsi a town in the Dehra Dun district (U. P.), Shabazgarhi a village in the Peshawar district (N.W. F.P.) Mansehra in the Hazara district (N. W. F. P.) Dhauli a village in the Puri district (Orissa) and Jaugada in the Ganjam district (Madras). But in the Dhauli and Jaugada edicts the words referring to Kerala are worn out. In the other four copies we find notable differences in the usage of the term referring to Kerala. In the Girnar edict[2] the term

1. Dr. Mukkerji's translation. *See* Asoka by Mukkerji, PP. 131—132

2. The Inscriptions of Asoka, Hultzsch P. P. 2-3

used is *Ketalaputo*, in the Kalsi edict [1] it is *Kelalaputo*, in the Shabazgarhi edict [2] it is *Keradaputro* and in the Mansehra edict [3] it is *Keralaputra*. But ordinarily in the translations of this edict the term is simply put down as " *Keralaputra* ".

Kerala is mentioned in this edict as one of the realms neighbouring to Asoka's empire where the king instituted hospitals for men and beasts. Providing comforts for men and animals, planting trees on way sides, digging wells and other such things mentioned in this edict were important items on the programme of Buddhistic propaganda which the king systematically pursued. This edict clearly proves that Kerala had come under the influence of the Buddhistic propaganda of Asoka. It is very significant that all the kingdoms mentioned in R. E II with the exception of " Satiyaputra and Keralaputra " are mentioned in the famous R. E.

---

1. Ibid PP. 28—29.
2. Ibid P. 51.
3. Ibid P. 72.
4. I came across, a very curious interpretation about these variations in the terms referring to Kerala in the *Keralacharitham* a Malayalam work by Mr. Attoor Krishna Pisharadi, a reputed Malayalam scholar. According to him the different copies of the edict must have been instituted at different periods with intervals of nearly two centuries between them. Keralaputra, he says, is reference to *Keralaputranmar* or *Raksha purushanmar*, the Protectors who are supposed to have ruled Kerala in ancient times. Later Kerala came under the rule of a single monarch and this accounts for the reference to Kerala as *Keralaputo*. With due respect to the scholarship of Mr. Pisharadi it must be pointed out that his explanation is very fantastic. There would have been some interval between the institution of one copy and another. But the interval could not have been two centuries. Even if we presume that there was such a long interval and that the changes he refers to in the administration of Kerala had taken place during this interval it would be absurd to argue that these changes were scrupulously noticed by those who instituted these edicts. In that case they ought to have taken cognizance of the changes in the governments of the other kingdoms also.

XIII where the names of kingdoms, where the Dharma prevailed are given. These kingdoms were no doubt beyond the direct political influence of the great Buddhist emperor. All scholars agree that the Magadha empire stopped short north of the Tamil country. But this does not necessarily imply that Buddhism stopped there. Asoka's edicts make special mention of the independent kingdoms of South India as being under the influence of Buddhistic propaganda and doctrines. A careful examination of Rock Edict XIII will throw much light on this point. The edict says :- "........... Indeed His Sacred Majesty desires towards all living beings freedom from harm, restraint of passions, impartiality and cheerfulness. And what is Dharma vijaya, moral conquest, is considered by his Sacred Majesty the principal conquest. And this has been repeatedly won by His Sacred Majesty both here (in his dominions) and among all the frontier peoples even to the extent of six hundred Yojanas where (are) the Yona King, Antiochus by name and beyond that Antiochus the four kings named Ptolemy, Antigonas, Magas and Alexander; below the Cholas, Pandyas *as far as* Tamraparni. Likewise here in the king's dominion among the Yonas and Kambojas among the Nabhakas and Nabhitis (Nabhapantis) and Pitinikas, among the Andhras and Palindas, everywhere are people following the religious injunction of His Sacred Majesty."[1]

It can be argued that in this edict there is no mention of Kerala and therefore Buddhism did not prevail in this country. But a careful examination of this edict will convince us that Kerala was not ignored in the edict When the edict refers to the southern kingdoms it says, "below, the Cholas, Pandyas *as far as Tamraparni*.

1. Mukkerji's translation. Asoka—PP. 162—170.

The expression 'as far as' is very significant to our study. Unfortunately Mr. Vincent Smith has overlooked this point. His translation of this passage reads: "And this is the chiefest conquest in His Majesty's opinion—the conquest by the Law of Piety; this also is that effected by His Majesty both in his own dominions and in all the neighbouring realms as far as six hundred leagues—even to where the Greek King named Antiochus dwells, and beyond that Antiochus to where dwell the four kings severally named Ptolemy, Antigonus, Magas and Alexander—and in the South the *kings of the Cholas and Pandyas and of Ceylon..........*" [1] If we accept Mr. Smith's translation, we have to concede that Kerala is not mentioned in the edict because the edict refers to the "Kings of the Cholas and Pandyas and of Ceylon" and not "to the Cholas and Pandyas as far as Tamraparni or Ceylon." In the translations of Dr. Hultzsch [2] and Mr. Bhandarkar, [3] however, we find reference to the South Indian kingdoms '*as far as*' Ceylon. The pali text speaks of '*Choda-Pamda ava Ta (m) bapam (ni) ya*' and its translation should be "Cholas, Pandyas as far as Tamraparni." [4] This can legitimately be interpreted to include the Kerala kingdom also. Even otherwise, the absence of a special mention of Kerala need not

---

1. Asoka, V. Smith PP. 131-132
2. Inscriptions of Asoka, Hultzsch P. 48
3. Asoka, R. G. Bhandarkar. P. 302.
4. In the Girnar Rock edict the portions relating to these kingdoms are worn out. In the Kalsi edict the reference is to "*Choda Pamdiya Arain Tambapamniya*" *(Inscriptions of Asoka, Hultzsch P P 43—46)*

In the Shahbazgarhi edict the reference is to *choda Pamda ava Ta [m] bapam [ni] ya*." (Ibid PP. 66—68,) In the Mansehra edict the reference is to *Choda-Pamdiya a Tambapa [ni] niya* (Ibid PP. 81—83.)

be taken seriously. When Kerala is mentioned in R. E. II along with its neighbouring Tamil kingdoms as a place where Asoka did Buddhistic propaganda, the failure to make a special mention of Kerala in R. E. XIII may be considered to be quite casual. It is difficult to argue that Kerala was selected only for the institution of hospitals for men and beasts and that Buddhism had not been introduced there, while it was introduced in the other regions of Tamilakam. In the light of what we have stated above it can be safely concluded that Buddhism had been introduced into Kerala and the Southern Tamil Kingdoms during the time of Asoka.

There is no sufficient ground to argue that Buddhism in Kerala was pre-Asokan. In fact what we gather from R. E. 13 is that the religion was introduced into Kerala and the southern kingdoms by Asoka. R. E. 13 says that Dharmavijaya *has been repeatedly won by His Sacred Majesty* both in his dominions and among the frontier peoples, among whom are mentioned the Tamil peoples. The edict clearly says that the conquest of Dharma was effected in these dominions by the king. ("...the conquest by the Law of Piety; this also is *that effected by His Majesty* in his own dominions and in all the neighbouring realms.....") The statements in R. E. II confirm this view.

There is a very good possibility for the spread of Buddhism in Kerala and the Tamil countries by Ceylonese missionaries. Our evidence in support of this view is mainly drawn from some ancient inscriptions and monuments of the Pandya country which are assigned to the third century B. C. But what we infer from these inscriptions is that Ceylonese missionaries must have

come to the Tamil countries only after Asoka had commenced his Buddhistic propaganda in the South.[1]

The monuments we are referring to are the mountain caverns known as 'Pancha pandava malai' which according to scholars are "the oldest that the Pandya country contains—or for the matter of fact the oldest in Southern India."[2] All scholars agree that they were undoubtedly the abodes of Buddhist monks in the third century B. C.[3] Also there are ample evidences to establish their connection with Ceylon. The general shape of these caverns and all details of their formation show a very close resemblance to the Buddhist caverns of

---

1. Mr K. V. Subramaniya Iyer (Archaeologist to the Madras Government) in an article on the Origin and decline of Buddhism in South India in the I A. Vol. XL says that Buddhism could not have been unknown in the Pandya country long before Asoka. It is based on the assumptions that Buddhism was introduced into Ceylon by Vijaya and his followers as early as the 5th century B. C. and that there was regular contact between South India and Ceylon during this period. The latter proposition may be true, but as the former view is found to be untenable, this conclusion cannot be accepted.

Vide, I. A. Vol. XL. PP. 209-210.

2. For a critical study of these monuments see article entitled "The earliest monuments of the Pandya country and their inscriptions" by Mr. K. V. Subramaniya Iyer in the Pr. O. C. 3rd session, PP. 275—300.

For a complete description of these monuments reference may be made to Mr. Venkayya's remarks on them in the Annual Report on Epigraphy, for 1908.

3. "These monuments are popularly called 'Panchapandava malai' a name which strongly reminds us of the Pandava Pabbata at whose foot the Buddha after his renunciation took his first meal which he had obtained by begging, and this fact suggests that these caves might have been the favourite resorts of Buddha bhiksus who probably had their abode in them as the name "Undankal" (the rock of one who took meals) applied to one of them indicates and should have been called Pandavamalai after the name of the monument where the Great One whom they followed in every way first resided. In this connection it is also worthy of note that some of these hills are termed 'Kalugumalai' a Tamil rendering of the Sanskrit Gradhrakutta the hill occupied by the Buddha during his ascetic life."

Pr. O. C. 3rd session PP. 278—279.

Ceylon. Also the script of the inscriptions on the rocks resembles in many respects the character of the Ceylon cave records of the same period. Further there is literary evidence to substantiate this view. The Maha Vamsa speaks of the missionary activities of Ceylonese monks abroad. It says: "The five principal 'theras' who had accompanied Mahinda from Jambudipa as well as those of whom Aritta was the principal and in like manner the thousands of sanctified priests, all natives of Lanka and inclusive of Sanghamitta the twelve theras who came from Jambudipa and many thousands of pious priestesses all natives of Lanka, all these profoundly learned and infinitely wise personages *having spread abroad the light of the Vinaya and other branches of faith* in due course of nature at subsequent periods submitted to the lot of mortality." The first countries that the missionaries from Ceylon could have visited are the Tamil countries of the south. In some of the inscriptions to which we have referred there is specific mention of "Ila" which means pertaining to Ceylon.[1] Many Buddhistic monuments have been discovered on the high range of hills called kalugumalai near Arittapatti. It is suggested that Arittapatti (the village of Aritta) in the Pandya country was the settlement of the Singhalese Apostle Aritta of the third century B. C.[2] All these evidences clearly prove the influence of Ceylonese missionaries in the Tamil countries. These inscriptions and monuments are assigned by scholars to a period mostly after the eighteenth year of the reign of Asoka,[3] *i.e.*, after Asoka had commenced his missionary activities in the south which are described in R. E. II & R. E. XIII.

1. Pr. O. C. 3rd session, P.P. 289—292.
2. I. A. Vol. XL. P. 211.
3. Ibid.

We do not have any definite evidence to prove that Ceylonese missionaries had spread their religion in Cheranadu. But it would not be worng to conclude that they had not excluded the Chera country from the sphere of their missionary activities, when we take into account the contiguity of the Pandya and Chera countries and the fundamental unity of ancient Tamilakam. Perhaps the Ceylonese monks must have concentrated their activities in the Pandya regions. It is quite possible that missionaries from these regions must have spread into the Chera territory.[1] However we have sufficient evidence to prove that Buddhism had spread into Kerala during this period.

1. In this connection mention may be made of the reference in the *Manimekalai* to the visit of the Dharmacharanas from Lanka to the Chera country when the ninth ancestor of Kovalan and the Chera ruler received them with due respect and the former built a Chaitya in the Chera capital.

CHAPTER II.

THE SPREAD OF BUDDHISM IN KERALA DURING THE EARLY CENTURIES OF THE CHRISTIAN ERA.

EVEN though Buddhism had not been a powerful force in the country during the centuries preceding the Christian era we have evidence to prove that during the early centuries of the Christian era it had gained a great degree of popularity. We shall examine the two famous epics of this period—the *Silappadikaram* and the *Manimekalai*—and see what light they throw on the condition of Buddhism in the country.

It is admitted by all scholars that the *Manimekalai* is a Buddhist work *par excellence*. Every canto of the *Manimekalai* is full of Buddhistic sentiments and its age may be considered to be marking the heyday of South Indian Buddhism. But there seems to be a great controversy about the religion of the author of the *Silappadikaram*. Some scholars are inclined to accept the *Silappadikaram* as the work of a Jain ascetic, and some as the work of a follower of the Vedic religion. In support of both the theories, verses and phrases are being quoted from the *Silappadikaram*.

But if we examine the position *de novo* a new light can be thrown on this subject, and that is, Ilango was a follower of neither Jainism nor Brahmanism but only an eclectic in religion. In fact if he had any special learning to any religion it appears to have been to Buddhism. The references in the *Silappadikaram* and the *Manimekalai* are sufficient to prove that Sattan and Ilango were close friends and collaborators. The 'Padikam' of the *Silappadikaram* tells us the circumstances which led to the composition of the two works.

When the 'hill-kuravas' report to Ilango the story of the ascent of the chaste lady to heaven Sattan who was at that time by the side of Ilango takes up the tale and describes the whole story.[1] After narrating the story Sattan tells Ilango: "So we shall write a peom with songs illustrating the three truths that Dharma will become the God of Death to kings who swerve from the path of righteousness, that it is natural for great men to adore a chaste lady of great fame and that destiny will manifest itself and be fulfilled." [2] Sattan asks Prince Ilango to write this story as it relates to all the three crowned monarchs of Tamilakam. In response to this request of Sattan Ilango composes the *Silappadikaram*. At the end of the Padikam we read that "these stories which are narrated in poetic form by Ilango Adigal were heard by Kulavanikan Sattan of Madura." [3] Thus the Padikam clearly shows that the inspiration for writing the *Silappadikaram* was from Sattan the Buddhist author of the *Manimekalai*. The objects of the *Silappadikaram*, says the Padikam, were three of which the first was to illustrate that Dharma will become the God of Death to kings who swerve from the path of righteousness.

The prologüe of the *Manimekalai* tells us that Sattan read out the thirty poems comprising the *Manimekalai* to Ilango and that the latter listened with great kindness. Thus we learn that both the authors composed their respective epics in close collaboration with each other.

It is clear from the accounts of the *Silappadikaram* and the *Manimekalai* that the authors intended the two

1. *Silappadikaram* Padikam. 11. 10-11.
2. Ibid. 11. 37-62.
3. Ibid. 11. 86-90.

works to be constituting one epic. The 'Narkatturai' of the *Silappadikaram* says: "So ends the *Silappadikaram* which really ends with the contents of the story in the "*Manimekalai*." Thus the story of the *Silappadikaram* is not complete without the *Manimekalai* and that of the *Manimekalai* is not full without the *Silappadikaram*. The reader will get the full sense of the story only if he reads both the works. The *Manimekalai* does not deal with the parentage of its heroine because it is already described in the *Silappadikaram*. The *Manimekalai* deals with only one aspect of Manimekalai's life, that is, her renunciation of life and acceptance of the Buddha Dharma. In fact the *Manimekalai* is called in its prologue "*Manimekalai turavu*" or "Renunciation of Manimekalai" and this strengthens the theory that the *Manimekalai* is only a continuation of the *Silappadikaram*. Thus we have to treat both the works together as one epic, each forming a part of the whole. The attempts on the part of some writers to deal with the two works separately are quite unwarranted in view of what we have stated above.

It is pointed out that the *Silappadikaram* does not deal with Buddhism at all whereas it forms the main theme in the *Manimekalai*. Sattan's main object was the exaltation of Buddhism and he makes every character in his work to serve as a means for this end. But Ilango takes up a more general attitude. It must be pointed out that Ilango had no chance to deal with Buddhism as a theme as Sattan had, because Buddhism is introduced only when Madhavi and Manimekalai embrace that religion and this is beyond the scope of the *Silappadikaram*. Ilango is not a great partisan like Sattan. He makes his characters worship different deities at the

1. *Manimekalai* Padikam. 11. 95 & 96.

same time. We find Kovalan and Kannaki circumambulating the temple of Vishnu and also worshiping at the Jaina shrine.[1] The *Silappadikaram* does not deal with any religion in particular—neither Brahmanism nor Jainism nor Buddhism--and so the omission of Buddhism need not lead to the conclusion that he was not an admirer or follower of Buddhism. We find casual references to Buddhism in the *Silappadikaram*, as we find to other religions.[2] The author has taken particular care to show his work to be non-controversial and so it is futile to attempt to estimate the extent of the popularity of the different religions from the references we find in the *Silappadikaram*. For that purpose we have to look to the *Manimekalai* the twin of the *Silappadikaram* which is primarily a boook on religion.

However from one importatnt event described in the *Silappadikaram* we can infer something about the popularity of Buddhism in the Chera country and it may be mentioned here. The *Silappadikaram* describing the consecration of the Pattini image at Vanji says that it was attended by King Gajabahu of Ceylon.[3] This visit of Gajabahu to Vanji is a very important factor in South Indian history; in fact it is the sheet anchor of South Indian chronology. Gajabahu is described in the *Mahavamsa* as an enthusiastic Buddhist. The whole tenor of the account of Gajabahu's life would lead one to the conclusion that he was too enthusiastic a Buddhist to care for any other cult.[4] How could such a devout Buddhist

---

1. *Silappadikaram*. Canto X. 11. 5—25.
2. Ibid. 11. 5-14.
3. Ibid Canto 30. 11. 155—164.
4. History of Tamils P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar. P. 380

king attend the consecration ceremony at Vanji? Gajabahu is said to have prayed to the deity to grace his countries also by her presence just as she had done on that auspicious day at Vanji. A voice is said to have come from the image saying "I have granted the boon."[1] Gajabahu is said to have introduced the Pattini cult into his territories also. Why did Gajabahu take so much interest in attending this ceremony and introducing the Pattini cult among his people who were devout Buddhists? Prof. P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar thinks that the participation of such an ardent Buddhist as Gajabahu in the ceremony for consecrating the chsate goddess is so very improbable that it could not have taken place.[2] But this view is not shared by many and need not be taken serious notice of at present. One can very well go to the other extent and say that the Pattini cult was originally a Buddhist cult and that was why Gajabahu attended that ceremony. Before dealing with this we can safely come to one non-controversial conclusion, and that is, the Chera king Chenguttuvan would not have been hostile to Buddhism or its followers. If he had been so, the Buddhist king Gajabahu would not have attended this ceremony.

What was the Pattini cult? Kannaki appears as a worshipper of Vishnu and Jaina in the *Silappadikaram*.[3] But in the *Manimekalai* she appears to be a devout Buddhist. When we examine her conversation with Manimekalai when the latter visited her at Vanji, we find her to be a sincere devotee of

---

1. *Silappadikaram* Canto 30. 11. 155—164.
2. History of the Tamils. P. 380
3. *Silappadikaram* Canto X. 11. 5—25.

the Buddha. She tells Manimekalai: "...................if we cease to be in heaven we are sure to be born in earth once again, thus working out the results of our deeds till such a time when in the Magadha country of unfailing rain in that bright city of Kapila there should appear Buddha of limitless perfection. He will then attain to enlightenment under the Bodhi tree and proceed out of mercy to living beings to teach the four truths, the twelve causes and conditions........"1 Again she tells Mamimekalai: "Oh dear one! you set out at this old city to learn from them, the votaries of the different systems of religion, their various systems and when it appears to you as it will that none of these contains the truth you will then follow the teaching of the Pitakas of the Great one."

---

1. உம்மை வினைவந் துருத்த லொழியா தெனு
மெய்ம்மைக் கிளவி விளம்பிய பின்னும்
சீற்றங்கொண்டு செழுநகர் சிதைத்தேன்
மேற்செய் நல்வினையின் விண்ணவர்ச் சென்றேன்
அவ்வினை யிறுதியினகு சினப்பாவ
மெவ்வகையானு மெய்துதல் ஒழியா
தும்பரில் வழியிம்பரிற் பல்பிறப்
பியாங்கணு மிருவினை யுய்த்துமைப்போல
நீங்கரும பிறவிக் கடலிடை நீந்திப்
பிறந்து மிறந்து முழல்வேம் பின்னர்
மறந்து மழைமரு மகத நன்னாட்டுக்
கொருபெருந் திலகமென் றுரவோ ருரைக்கும்
கரவரும் பெருமைக் கபிலை யம்பதி
யளப்பரும் பார மிதையளவின்று நிறைத்துத்
துளக்கமில் புத்த ஞாயிறு தோன்றிப்
போதிமூலம் பொருந்தி வந்தருளித்
தீதறு நால்வகை வாய்மையுந் தெரிந்து
பன்னிரு சார்பின் பகுதித் தோற்றமும்
அந்நிலை யெல்லாம் அழிவுறு வகையும்
இற்றென வியம்பிக் குற்றவீ டெய்தி
எண்ணருஞ் சக்ரவாள மெங்கணும்
அண்ணலடிக் கதிர் விரிக்கும் காலை.

Manimekalai Bk 26. l. l. 32—53.

In both these conversations Sattan makes us belive that the chaste goddess was a Buddhist deity. Ilango is non-committal about the religion of the chaste goddess. But Sattan very clearly pictures her to be a Buddhist deity. If we are to accept Sattan's version as correct, Gajabahu's participation in the ceremony at vanji appears to be very reasonable.

Chenguttuvan was obviously a follower of the Vedic faith. But his brother Ilango is said to have become an ascetic. The story of his renouncing life given in the *Silappadikaram* [1] is as follows: "Once the two princes Chenguttvan and his younger brother were both seated in the assembled court of their father- A physiognomist who was there, looking at the younger of the two predicted that he had in his face marks of 'a ruler of men." The prince got angry that predi. ction should have been made and to avoid any possibility of misunderstanding, he took a vow of renouncing life and did so forthwith so that there may be no misunderstanding of his position and that no damage may be done to the legitimate claims of his elder brother." The *Silappadikaram* says that Ilango went to the "Gunavayir kottam" which means the eastern vihara. Adiyarkkunallar the commentator of the *Silappadikaram*. gives its meaning as ,'Aruhan koil" or Jaina shrine and this has given some foundation to the theory that Ilango become a Jain. But there is no other evidence to warrant such an inference. Adikal is a honorophic term applied to any saintly person. [2] Ilango's religion appears to us non-sectarian. As we have already said, if at

1. *Silappadikaram* Ch. 30 11. 172-183.

2. In the Tamil Lexicon it is given as a term of respect used with the names of sages and ascetics male or female.

all he had any leaning towards any sect it must have been towards Buddhism. His close friendship with Sattanar, and the fact that his *Silappadikaram* is the twin of the great Buddhistic epic the *Manimekalai* strengthen this view. Ilango is said to have listened to all the 30 chapters of the *Manimekalai*. If he had no sympathy and admiration for Buddhism it is unlikely that he would have "listened with gladness" to Sattanar's poems where most of the characters who appear in Ilango's *Silappadikaram* are pictured as devout Buddhists. We do not rush to the conclusion that Ilango was an ardent Buddhist in the sense Sattanar was. But it would not be wrong to describe him to be an eclectic with strong sympathies for Buddhism. The fact that the Chera ruler's brother showed so much interest in this religion is illustrative of its popularity in the Chera country.

Now we shall examine the direct references in the *Manimekalai* to the prevalence of Buddhism in ancient Kerala. Manimekalai the heroine met the votaries of the different religious sects at Vanji and listened to their expositions.[1] But she felt that "the teachings of these would not conform either to truth itself as taught in learned books or as practised by the knowing." She then searched for Aravana Ádikal and her mother and companion in the city of Vanji. Passing through the outer city into the fort and the various streets she reached the place 'where those that travel through the air get down to land.' She entered the 'Vihara of the Bauddhas as beautiful as the Aindira vihara at Kaveri pattinam where the residents listened to the exposition of the teachings of the Buddha.[2] Manimekalai found among the Buddhist mendicants at the

1. *Manimekalai*. Ch. 27.
2. *Manimekalai* Ch. 28.

vihara her grand-father [Kovalan's father] who narrated to her the history of that Chaitya and the circumstances that led to his visit there. The Buddhist vihara at Vânji was constructed by 'the ninth ancestor of Kovalan' who was an intimate friend of the Chera king. Kovalan's father narrates this story to Manimekalai. "Once on a former occasion when the great Chera king the ruler of the Kuttavar, who planted his emblem of the bow on the Himalayas, with the ladies of the household entered this grove and remained here in the pleasance for recreation a few "Dharma charanas" who having worshipped the hill Samnoli in the island of Lanka and passing round in circumambulation made up their minds to get down to earth as the time for setting the king on the good path had come. Seeing them on this rock he offered worship to them as a result of previous good deeds and washing their feet in due form offered to them food prepared of 'the four kinds and six flavours.' Having done this he praised their condescension and offered them worship with due hospitality along with his whole court. On that occassion these holy ones expounded to him the sufferings of birth and the joys of ceasing to be born and thus implanted into his mind the Four Truths of the first teacher of the Dharma. Then the ninth ancestor of Kovalan your father, being an intimate friend of the Chera king had also the benefit of the instructian as a result of the accumalated merit of his good deeds. Distributing among the needy all the ancestral wealth that he inherited and all that he himself had added to it he erected for the Sugata (Buddha) this Chaitya of brilliant white stucco with its turrets reaching to the skies."

It is difficult to identify the Chera monarch mentioned here. He is described as the contemporary

of the ninth ancestor of Kovalan. Naturally he must be the ninth ancestor of Chenguttuvan.[1] From the scanty data available about the ancestors of Chenguttuvan it is not possible to identify this particular Chera king.

The ninth ancestor of Kovalan who is referred to here was a wealthy merchant from the Chola country who had become an intimate friend of the Chera king. When the Dharma charanas from Ceylon preached about the doctrines of 'the first teacher of the Dharma' he became very much interested in the religion and embraced it spending all his money in religious charities. From the account given in the *Manimekalai* we gather that the Chera king himself became deeply interested in the new faith. But there is no direct evidence to show that he adopted Buddhism. He received the Buddhist divines with great respect and listened to their exposition of the Dharma. He also gave permission to Kovalan to construct the Buddhist Chaitya in his capital. All these things are strong evidences to show the great interest which the Chera kings evinced in Buddhism and the toleration they extended to that faith.

The Buddhist Chaitya at Vanji must have been a very big one. The *Manimekalai* speaks of its "turrets reaching to the skies." [2] It was famous all over South

---

1. The *Padirrupattu* gives the following list of Chera kings:—
 (1) Imayavaramban Nedumceralatan
 (2) Palayanai Sel-Kelu Kuttuvan
 (3) Kal nkaik-Kanni Narmudic ceral
 (4) Kadal-pirakottiya Sen-Kuttuvan
 (5) Adu-Kotp ttuc ceralatan
 (5) Selvak-Kadumko Valiyatan
 (7) Perum Ceral Irumporai
 (8) Ilam-Ceral Irumporai.

2. *Manimekalai* Book 28. l. 131.
 "வாரேறுங்கும் சிமையத்து வாரவொளிட்சயித்தும்"

India and Buddhist mendicants from the different parts of Tamilnadu used to flock there. Kovalan's father himself tells Manimekalai that "it was erected in order that those that live in this world might visit it and destroy the evil attaching to them."[1] He also informs her that many holy mendicants who had left Kanchi because of the famine there had settled down in the Buddhist vihara at Vanji. Obviously the Buddhist vihara at Vanji must have been a very popular one. Unfortunately we do not have any extant relics to prove what this Vihara was like. Of course there are some neglected sites in and near modern Cranganore claiming to have once housed this famous Buddhist Chaitya. Archaeologists and research scholars have yet to turn their serious attention to this historic town. An intensive archaeological exploration in this ancient town will be helpful in unfolding many unknown chapters in South Indian history.

In conclusion one important observation should be made. We have drawn our inferences mainly from the Tamil classics about the prevalence of Buddhism in the Chera country during the early centuries of the Christian era. We have tried to prove that Buddhism was popular in the Chera country and its capital Vanji was an important centre of Buddhist activities. But it should be specially emphasised that Buddhism was only one among the many religions in Kerala at that time. It was no doubt patronised by the princes and popular with the people. But it would be wrong to conclude, as some writers do, that it was the predominant religion of the country. We have absolutely no evidence

---

1. Ibid 1. 132.
"சேணோர்க்கெல்லாம் மிடர்கெட வியன்றது"

to prove that Buddhism was strong enough to claim the majority of the people as its followers. Even during the heyday of its popularity it did not displace the other religions.

CHAPTER III

THE PERUMAL WHO BECAME A BAUDDHA.

KERALA is famous in history as the "land of the Perumals". We have ample information about the administration of the ancient Chera monarchs known by the title of Perumals but there is a good deal of confusion about their chronology and respective achievements. The *Keralolpathi* mentions about twenty five Perumals and gives many details about the administration of each one of them. But unfortunately these details do not find corroboration in the accounts given in the Tamil classics. Many popular legends and traditions have grown up round the history of these Perumals to make the confusion worse.

What is important in our present study is the account given in the *Keralolpathi* of the conversion of two Perumals of ancient Kerala to "Bauddha Margam". They are Palli Bana Perumal and Cheraman Perumal. The "Bauddha Margam" said to have been embraced by these Perumals have been differently interpreted by different writers. "Bauddha" literally means "a follower of the Buddha" but in popular parlance this term has been used to refer to all non-Hindu sects in Kerala. This has given rise to many theories about the conversion of these two rulers. In fact all religions known to Kerala—Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity and Islam—have claimed these Perumals as their converts. Unfortunately a lot of confusion exists in the writings of many of the historians, as they mistake one Perumal for the other. We have gathered some new evidences to prove that the Perumal who became a Bauddha was Palli Bana

Perumal and the Bauddha Margam embraced by him was Buddhism. But before we discuss this question, let us examine the truth about Cheraman Perumal's conversion and come to a conclusion about it.

It is unnecessary to discuss in detail the theory that Cheraman Perumal became a Christian. There is no reliable evidence either literary or epigraphical or even traditional to prove that Cheraman Perumal became a Christian. There are some vague statements in some of the stories current among the Kerala Christians about the conversion of a Perumal to their faith. If there can be any truth in this tradition, the referenec can be only to Bana Perumal as we shall see presently. One writer has propounded a curious theory that the Cheraman became "a convert to Jainism and that his departure to Mecca called in Sanskrit Magadha, (!) was due chiefly to the religious inducements of Majains called Jains or Bauddhas"[1]

This theory rests wholly on conjecture and has absolutely nothing in history or traditons to support it. Dr. Hultzsch has rightly dismissed these observations as "wild speculations."[2] The theories about Cheraman's conversion to Islam, Buddhism and Saivism deserve more serious notice. But we shall first of all attempt to establish his historical identity.

We find the story of Cheraman Perumal's conversion in Malayalam works (like the *Keralolpathi*) in the accounts of the Mohommedans (like the Tohfut ul *Mujahideen*) in the writings of foreign authors (Joint Commissioners' Report, Letters of Visscher etc.) and in

1. Memorandum on the Syrain and Jewish copper plates, Mr. Kelu Nair. Quoted in the H. of K. Vol. 1. P. 461.

2. I. A. Vol. XX. P P. 285—292. Note. 12.

Tamil classics (like the *Peria Puranam*). These accounts disagree fundamentally in many details, but they all agree in saying that Cheraman was the last of the Perumals..

The *Keralolpathi* says that Cheraman came to the throne in A. D. 355 and abdicated in A. D. 428. At the same time it says that the Perumal was a contemporary of the great Sankaracharya. We have already expressed the view that the dates of the *Keralolpathi* are thoroughly unreliable. Still its suggestion that the Perumal and Sankara were contemporaries is very helpful in fixing the former's chronology. The Mohommedan traditions say that the Perumal after his conversion to Islam proceeded in a Moorish vessel to Jeddah and had an interview with the Prophet who was at that time sojourning there. The Prophet is said to have canonized the Perumal under the name of Thia-uj-udden i. e. the crown of the faith.[1] This would make the Perumal a contemporary of the Prophet. But this is purely a tradition and as such cannot be accepted at all. The 'Tohfut' says that the Perumal must have left the kingdom on his pilgrimage some 200 years after the flight of the prophet from Mecca to Medina i. e. some time about A. D. 816.[2] We get another clue to the date of the Perumal from a reference in the *Keralolpathi* and the Joint Cammissioners' Report (1792 A. D.) to an invasion from the east in the time of Cheraman Perumal. The Report says that the time of their writing was about 1000 years after the great invasion from the east had been beaten off by Cheraman.[3] This

1. H. of K. Vol. I P. 433.
2. Tohfut-ul-Mujahiddeen.* p. 55.
3. J. C. R. Page 2. Quoted in *Bharata Kaumudi* (1945) P. 22.

invasion is identified with that of the Pandyan king Varaguna (A. D. 765-815) which may be roughly assigned to the year A. D. 780.[1] Thus the Perumal's reign can be assigned to the close of the 8th century A. D. and the beginning of the 9th century. This is confirmed by the fact that Sundaramurthi, Cheraman's friend and preceptor, is assigned to the period A. D. 770-810.[2]

First let us examine the most popular theory that Cheraman Perumal became a convert to Islam. The Moplah tradition that the Perumal met the prophet must necessarily be a figment of imagination—" a pious invention of the Mohommedans " as Mr. Wheeler puts it.[3] There is absolutely no reference in the various accounts relating to the prophet's activities to any meeting with any king like this.

If the Perumal had embraced Islam it would have been certainly noticed by the Mohommedan travellers in Malabar in the medieval period; the conversion of a king of Cheraman's eminence to their faith could not have been ignored by them. But the Arab merchants and visitors of this period make no such reference. On the other hand we have the testimony of the Arab merchant Suliman (C. A. D. 850) who says " that in Malabar he did not know of any one of either nation (Chinese or Indian) that had embraced Mohommedanism or spoken Arabic. " None of the early travellers or geographers—Suliman (A.D.850) Al Biruni (979-1039A.D) Al Idrisi (1153) Benjamin of Tudela (1159-60) Rashidu'ddin (1247-1281) Al Kazwini (1263-75) Marco Polo (1271-94) Abul feda (1273-1331)—no one of these

1. *Bharata Kaumudi* P. 23.

2, Ibid.

3. History of India. Vol. III. P. 423.

refers to the story of Mohommedan conversion. Even Ibn Batuta (1324-54) who gives many details about the followers of his faith in these countries does not refer to this event. Most probably this story of the Perumal's conversion to Islam arose only after the advent of the Portuguese. The Portuguese writers are the earliest to notice it. Mr. Logan brings forward many arguments in support of the theory of the Perumal's conversion to Islam, but since most of his postulates have been proved to be erroneous by later researches it is unnessary to refer to them here.[1] In the absence of any reliable written record of respectable antiquity it is impossible to accept the tradition of the Perumal's conversion to Islam.

Now we shall examine the theory of the Perumal's conversion to Buddhism. Mr. Talboys Wheeler is disposed to think that the Perumal became a Buddhist monk. But a critical examination of this theory will convince us that it is not based on historical facts.

It is very interesting to note that the story of Cheraman Perumal's conversion given in the *Keralolpathi* has a striking resemblance to the story of the Buddhist king Nasanga described in the *Kerala Mahatmyam*. The story of the *Keralolpathi* is as follows:-[2] The Perumal's wife falls in love with Patamala Nayar the chief of his body guard and makes offers to him. The loyal chief refuses to comply with the queen's desires which rouses the anger of the haughty queen. She swears to take vengeance and instigates the Perumal to punish the chief for some supposed crime. While the faithful

---

1. M. M. D. PP. 194—198.
   Vide criticism of Mr. Logan's theory in H of K. PP. 446—456.
2. H. of K. Vol. I. P. 458.

servant is on the point of being executed the Devas alight in a heavenly chariot and carrys the Nayar bodily to the upper regions. The Perumal seeing the chariot ascending heavenwards begs of his late servant to advise him as to how he can attain Moksha. The Nayar exhorts his quondam sovereign to give up his religion and to conform to the tenets of Mohammed. Adopting the advise, Cheraman gives up Hinduism, becomes a follower of the Prophet and leaves for Mecca.

In the *Kerala Mahatmyam* we find more or less the same plot. Nasanga is described as a powerful Buddhist king whose might could not be overcome even by Parasurama. "Once the king was detained in the chase by Siva in disguise whilst the queen fell in love with Krodha the minister and made offers to him, the flat refusal of which prompted her desire a speedy revenge. She acts all the part of Potiphar's wife. But the faithful servant on the point of being executed is discovered mounted on the heavenly chariot and parting advises the king to go to Mecca and worship there Vishnu incarnate in all shapes (Viswarupavatara) in order to go to Vishnu's heaven. The king did so."[1]

In both these stories we find the 'Potiphar's wife', the faithful minister, the intervention of Gods, the heavenly chariot and the parting advice to go to Mecca! A casual reading of these two stories will convince us that one has borrowed from the other. In both the stories the reader is taken by surprise by the conclusion. It is really very amusing to read the story in the *Kerala Mahatmyam* where the Buddhist king is asked to go to Mecca to worship Vishnu there! In fact the accounts in both these works are thoroughly unhelpful in our present discussion.

1. Madras Journal of literature and Science Vol. XIII P. 103.

It is very improabble that Cheraman would have become a convert to Buddhism which was steadily declining in Kerala during his period. Buddhism had lost its popularity by the 9th century A. D. and even the old converts were being brought back to the Vedic fold. It is illogical to contend that the Perumal abdicated his throne and embraced a religion which had become unpopular in his country. Further there is absolutely no evidence--either literary or craditional--to prove that Cheraman ever became a Buddhist. The story of his conversion to Buddhism is largely based on conjectures and may be dismissed as unhistorical.

We have ample literary evidences to prove that Cheraman Perumal was an ardent Saivite and that he died as a Saivite. The *Halasya Mahatmyam* and *Tiruvilayadal Puranam* refer to Cheraman Perumal as a great Saiva devotee. Cheraman is described as one of the sixty three Saiva saints. In Sekkilar's *Periya Puranam* we find a separate chapter on "Cheraman Perumal Nayanar" dealing with the life of the Perumal from early years down to his Pilgrimage. Sundaramurthi Nayanar was the Perumal's closest friend and the Perumal is said to have undertaken a pilgrimage to Chidambaram and other such holy places of the Saivites in his company. The *Periya Puranam* gives full details of the Perumal's visit to Tiruvarur, Madura, Chidambaram and other places and also about his death. Cheraman and Sundara Nayanar are said to have ascended to heaven on the same day.

In the light of these clear evidences in the Tamil literature we can safely conclude that Cheraman Perumal never adopted Buddhism or any other religion but died as a Saivite.

The Conversion of Palli Bana Perumal.

The *Keralolpathi* gives the story of Palli Bana Perumal's conversion to Bauddha Margam under the title "Bauddhanaya Perumal" or the perumal who became a Bauddha. While we discussthe story of his conversion we have to take into account some of the important popular traditions and legends about him. There are two temples in North Travancore which are closely associated with Palli Bana Perumal in popular tradition—the temple at Kiliroor two miles west of Kottayam town and the one at Nilamperoor six miles south west of Kottayam. According to tradition, the Perumal after his abdication left his capital and reached Kiliroor travelling by boat along the lake route. After a short stay there, he is said to have gone to Nilamperoor following the lake route and spent his last days there. There are many vestiges in both places associated with Palli Bana Perumal and these have strengthened the traditional accounts. We shall make use of these traditions where-ever they are useful.

Let us first of all examine the story of his conversion given in the *Keralolpathi.* The following is the account of the *Keralolpathi* :— When Kaliyuga had advanced, the Brahmins brought Bana Perumal from Bana Puram and installed him at 'Allur Perumkoilakam.' During his reign some Bauddhas came to his court and preached to him the doctrines of their religion. The Permal embraced the Bauddha margam convinced of the truth of it, and ordered the Brahmins that the new faith should be enforced throughout Malanadu. Disappointed, the Brahmins retired to Trikkariyur. Fortunately a holy saint by name Jangaman came there and the Brahmins complained to him of their sorry plight. The

saint enjoined on them to observe a purification ceremony by doing 'Deepa Pradikshana' (going round a lamp) every day after sun set. He also taught them a hymn in praise of God Brahma and assured them that if they regularly followed his instructions their grievances would be redressed. The Brahmins carried out his instructions scrupulously and once six Sastris from outside came to their help. They were Bhata Acharya, Bhata Bana, Bhata Vijayan, Bhata Mayuran, Bhata Gopalan and Bhata Narayanan. The Sastris assured the Brahmins that they would do their best to relieve them of the trouble of the Bauddhas. The Sastris had a hot discussion with the Perumal about the truth of the new faith. Finding the Perumal steadfast in his faith they suggested that there should be an open debate between themselves and the Bauddhas. Those who failed in the debate were to be expelled from the country and their tongues cut off. In the debate that was held, the Bauddhas were defeated and so the Perumal expelled them from the country after cutting off their tongues. The Perumal abdicated in great remorse and left for 'Makkam' (Mecca?) [1]

The *Keralolpathi* mentions Palli Bana Perumal as one of the twenty five Perumals who are said to have ruled Kerala in succession. It says that Bana Perumal was brought from 'Banapuram' by the Brahmins. It is interesting to note that the author of the *Keralolpathi* has assigned native places to most of the perumals exactly corresponding to their names. For example, the *Keralolpathi* says that Keya Perumal was brought from Keya Puram, Chola Perumal from Chola Puram, Pandy Perumal from Pandy Puram, Arya Perumal from Arya

1. *Keralolpathi* (Mangalore Edition) PP. 28—31.

Puram and so on. It would be futile to attempt an identification of these various place names mentioned in the *Keralolpathi*. The author of the *Keralolpathi* easily coins place names corresponding to the names of the Perumals; and many of these places exist only in the pages of the *Keralolpathi*. The Bana Puram of Bana Perumal may be dismissed as a figment of the author's imagination. Mr. Logan thinks that Bana Puram was anothor name for Mamallapuram. The Mahavali dynasty of kings was called the Bana dynasty and so Mr. Logan suggests that Bana must have belonged to the Mahavali dynasty.[1] But most of the modern scholars are inclined to believe that the Perumals belonged to more or less one dynasty of rulers who ruled in hereditary succession. The theory of their being brought from various places outside the Chera country as and when the throne become vacant need not be taken serious notice of. It will be quite reasonable to argue that Bana Perumal was a member of the great Perumal dynasty of indigeneous rulers.

If we examine the ancient Tamil clasics which deal with the history of Chera Nadu we come across the names of some kings having the title of "Vanavaramban." For example, the *Purananuru* makes mention of a king by name "Udiyan ceral" who is regarded as the founder of the Chera dynasty of the Sangam period. He bears the tile of "Vanavaramban". Another king having this title is Narmudicceral[2]. "Vanavaramban" has been translated by some Malayalam writers as Banavarman and they try to identify Palli Bana Perumal with one of these Chera monarchs having the title of "Vana-

---

1. M. M. D. P. 230 Foot note I.

2. *Padirruppattu* iv.

varamban".[1] It passes ones imagination how "Vanavaramban" can become Banavarman. "Vanavaramban" literally means one whose kingdom is bounded by the sky. It is a descriptive epithet referring to the extensive territories and conquests of the king, and it need not be given any other meaning. It would be futile to look for the identity of Bana Perumal in the list of kings mentioned in the *Padirrupattu* or the *Purananuru*. The *Keralolpathi* says that the first Perumal was installed in the year 216 A. D. Of course the *Keralolpathi* is guilty of very great anachronisms and its dates are sometimes misleading. But it is difficult to agree with Mr. Sewell completely when he says that the dates of the *Keralolpathi* are entirely fictitious[2]. There must be some truth in the statement in the *Keralolpathi* that the first Perumal came to the throne in 216. A. D. The *Keralolpathi* says that each of the Perumals ruled for a period of twelve years and that some died or were dethroned before their allotted span of twelve years. On the basis of the accounts of the *Keralolpathi* the follwing chronology can be constructed.

Keya Perumal	....	216—225 A. D.
Chola Perumal	...	225--236 A D.
Pandy Perumal	....	236—245 A. D.
Bhutaraya Perumal	.	245—257 A. D.
Kerala Perumal	....	257—269 A. D.
Chengal Perumal	...	269—281 A. D.
Cholia Perumal	....	281—293 A. D.
Kulasekhra Perumal.		293—305 A. D.
Bana Perumal	....	305—317 A. D.

1. Another interestihg explanation for Vanavaramban is Vanavaranban or one who is dear to the Gods or Devanam-priya. It is suggested that the kings having these titles were heretics. We can only say that this interpretation is too far-fetched.

2. Sketches of the dynasties of S. India. P. 56. Note 7.

From these accounts the obvious conclusion we can draw is that the *Keralolpathi* was dealing with the history of the Perumals in the Post-Sangam epoch. None of the Perumals mentioned in the *Keralolpathi* is mentioned in any of the sangam classics and this is because the latter deal with an earlier phase of Chera history. The *Keralolpathi* mentions the period 305—317 A. D. as the reign of Bana Perumal who is described to have become a Bauddha. There is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the year 317 given in the *Keralolpathi* as the year of the Perumal's conversion. Even though there are many variations in the different versions of the *Keralolpathi* we find the year 317 A. D. uniformly mentioned. The chronogram mentioned in the *Keralolpathi* admits of no other interpretation. If the same chronogram is found in more than one document as referring to the same incident, there is no justification for our brushing it aside as unreliable. Dr. P. J. Thomas [1] has attempted to place Bana Perumal in the first century A. D. and this is mainly based on the assumption that Bana varman is the same as "Vanavaramban" We have already stated above that this interperetation cannot be accepted and that Bana perumal must be assigned to a period later than that of the Chera kings mentioned in the sangam classics. In the absence of any other evidence to the contrary, there is no valid reason to question the accuracy of the chronogram mentioned in the *Keralolpathi*.

What was the Bauddha maragam adopted by Palli Bana Perumal?

If we accept the literal meaning of the term Bauddha margam there need not be any doubt about

---

1. "Bauddhanaya Perumal"- article in Malayalam in the *Basha poshini* Vol. 11 & 12 Book. 23. P. 410.

the religion embraced by Bana Perumal. But since the advent of Christianity and Islam in Kerala these religions also have been referred to as Bauddha margam and thus a controversy has arisen about Bana's religion.

Mr. Logon Mr. Whitehouse and others are of opinion that the religion which Bana embraced was Islam. Mr. Logan interprets Bauddha to mean 'Mappilla' or Mussalman and in his rendering of the *Keralolpathi* story into English he uses the words 'Mappilla' and Mohommadan in the place of Bauddha.[1] One main argument in support of this theory of conversion to Islam is the statement in the *Keralolpathi* that the Perumal after his conversion went to 'Makkam' or Mecca. Bana Perumal is not the only ruler of Kerala whose name is associated with Mecca. The *Keralolpathi* itself gives the story of Cheraman Perumal's conversion to Islam and pilgrimage to Mecca. The *Kerala Mahatmyam* gives the story of a Kerala king by name Nasanga who also undertakes a pilgrimage to Mecca. Some scholars are prepared to accept the Mecca pilgrimage as a historical fact. They only doubt as to which of the two Perumals—Bana or Cheraman—undertook it.

Mr. Whitehouse seems to have absolutely no doubt as to which of the Perumals undertook the pilgrimage. He is emphatic in his statement that it was Bana Perumal and not Cheraman Perumal. He says "The traditions of the vulgar—who seem to attribute to one man what was really done by a succession of rulers bearing the title of Perumal—will tell you that their favourite hero Cheraman Perumal became a convert to Mohommedanism; but if one looks into the old Malayalam history of Kerala we find a distinct statement

1. M. M. D. P. 230.

that it was Bana Perumal who turned Mussalman and went to Mecca and not the last of the princes Cheraman Perumal."[1] An examination of the old Malayalam history of Kerala which Mr. Whitehouse suggests, does not however help us to come to such an unequivocal conclusion as this. If we are to base our arguments on the *Keralolpathi* we have to believe that both the Perumals undertook the Haj. The *Keralolpathi* does not say that Bana became a convert to Islam. It simply states that the Perumal went to Meeca after abdicating the throne. After the advent of the Arabs in Malabar sea voyages to Mecca had become a regular feature there. Mecca was the usual place of destination for those who undertook sea voyages and therefore all voyages by sea came to be called voyage to Mecca. By 'voyage to Mecca' the author of the *Keralolpathi* probably only meant a voyage by sea. According to popular traditions Bana Perumal after his abdication left his capital by boat to the south following the lake route and came over to Nilamperoor. Peahaps it was this journey of the Perumal by the lake route which was described as 'vayage to Mecca.'

No further argument is necessary to prove that the religion which Bana embraced was not Islam than a mention of the fact that Bana lived many centuries before the foundation of Islam. The *Keralolpathi* itself which states that Bana went to Mecca, has assigned to him a period three centuries before the advent of Islam.

The Bauddha margam which Bana embraced has been interpreted to mean Christianity by some scholars. Mr. P. J. Thomas in a very scholarly article in the *Basha Poshini* (Bk. 23 of 1094 M. E. i. e.

1. Lingerings of light in a dark island. P. 54.

1919 A. D.) brings forward some arguments in support of this view. The *Keralolpathi* says that Bana embraced Bauddha margam. The word 'margam,' says Mr. Thomas, is generally used in Kerala to refer to either Islam or Christianity. Further, if the Perumal had accepted Buddhism it would not have been necessary for him to abdicate because Buddhism in this period was not considered to be so very heretical as to warrant his abdication. But the *Keralolpathi* says that the Perumal abdicated saying "since I have accepted the Bauddha margam, I have no other go."[1] Therefore the Bauddha margam which the Perumal adopted must have been some religion other than Buddhism. The anachronism in accepting that it was Islam has already been pointed out. So the inference is that the Perumal must have become a Christian.

Another strong argument in support of the Perumal's conversion to Christianity is one based on the popular tradition of the Perumal's visit to Nilamperoor. This tradition of the Perumal spending his last days at Nilamperoor rests on some sound foundations. The temple at Nilamperoor is even now called 'Palli Bhagavathi temple' after Palli Bana Perumal. The close association of the term 'Palli' with the temple is significant. The place where the temple is situated is called 'Pallippatikkal.' The accountant in the temple is called 'Palli Menon.' The village folk of Nilamperoor believe like gospel truth that the Perumal spent his last days in their country. They pointed out to the author of this thesis a very old house near the temple belived to have been occupied by the Perumal. That house is still called 'Kottaram'

The *Keralolpathi.* P. 30.

or palace. There is a dilapidated structure in front of the temple on the left side of the compound which is belived to be the tomb of the Perumal. The villagers of Nilamperoor even now observe a ceremony of asking the permission of the Perumal before they begin the annual festival in the temple. The temple 'Pramani' and the villagers stand with awe and respect for a few moments near the Perumal's tomb observing all the formalities of an interview with a king. Perfect silence is observed and after a few minutes the silence is broken by loud cries of cheers as a token of having obtained the Perumal's permission to start the festival. The villagers observe it even to-day and they say it was the practice prevalent in their village when the Perumal was alive. The Nilamperoor temple has extensive acres of paddy fields which the people believe were endowed by the Perumal himself. The proceeds from these lands are the main source of income to the temple. All these things lend weight to the tradition that the Perumal actually spent the last days of his life at Nilamperoor spending his money in religious charities.

Some years ago a bronze statuette was unearthed from the tomb of the Perumal and it is widely believed to be the statuette of the Perumal himself. It is about 9 inches in height and 2 inches in thickness. It holds a staff with a knob at the head by the left hand and a broken one by the right hand. What is very surprising about this statuette is that it has a very conspicuous cross about an inch long in the middle of a string of pearls hanging from the neck. The broken-off portion of the staff in the right hand is reported to have been surmounted by a cross. It is also said that while the work men were digging deep into the tomb

they struck against a large stone slab on which a cross was found sculptured.

The presence of the cross on the statuette has strengthened the theory of the Perumal's conversion to Christianity. There are some scholars who believe that the Perumal became a priest.[1] But from the evidence that we are giving below we can come to the conclusion that the Bauddhamargam mentioned in the *Keralolpathi* was Buddhism and that if the Perumal adopted Christianity it was after he had become a Buddhist.

The *Keralolpathi* says that the Bauddhas came from outside and converted the Perumal to Bauddha margam. From the Saivite and Vaishnavite literature of ancient Tamilnadu we gather that it was a common practice in those days for the Buddhists to engage in scholarly religious discourses and debates with people of other religions. Religious debates of this kind with the usual punishments like cutting off the tongue for those who are defeated are frequently mentioned in the Saiva and Vaishnava classics. It is a well known fact that Christian missionaries had never adopted this practice for the propagation of their faith. It is not mentioned in any of the books of the Christians that the early Christian missionaries engaged themselves in religious debates with others.

The author of this thesis has gathered some new evidences to prove that the Perumal became a Buddhist. We have referred to the tradition that Bana Perumal stayed for some time at Kiliroor a place two miles west of the Kottayam town. There is a big Bhagavati temple at Kiliroor on the top of a small hill. Within the temple walls on the left side of the main

---

1. Malabar Christians and their ancient documents. T. K. Joseph. P. 9.

shrine there are two Buddhist images housed in a tiled shed. In the front room of this shed there is a bronze image of the Buddha shown in the characteristic Yogic pose under a Bhodhi tree. This image is being worshipped by the local Hindus as a Hindu deity. Just behind this room, in the same shed, there is another image of the Buddha embossed on a wall. Here again the Buddha is seen in the usual Yogic pose under a Bhodhi tree. The second image is popularly known as Pallivanavar and we find this name inscribed in Malayalam at the bottom of the image. This image is practically "black holed" and no worship is being offered here. It appears that this was the original temple at Kiliroor and the present Bhagavati image was a later installation. It is quite reasonable to believe that the Buddha temple at Kiliroor was converted into a Bhagavati temple when Buddhism declined in the country. The Buddha was incorporated into the Hindu pantheon and his image came to be worshipped as that of a regular Hindu deity.

The name of the image - Pallivanavar - is very significant. Under the well known rule of grammar the letters "ba" and "va" are inter changeable and it is quite correct to conclude that "Palli banavar" and "Palli vanavar" are the same. The Buddha image must have been called Pallivanavar after Pallibanavar, the founder of the temple.

Another significant evidence to strengthen this theory is that at Nilamperoor where the Perumal is believed to have spent his last days there is a Buddha image housed in a small shed on the left side of the main shrine there. The most significant fact about this Buddha image is that it resembles in every respect

the Kiliroor image. A comparison of the two images will convince even a casual observer that they must have been made by the same architect or that one is a close imitation of the other. The author of this thesis was informed by the accountant of the Nilamperoor temple that formerly there was a wall-sgitaeparn the shed from the main shrine and that no worship was being offered to the Buddha image. But now the Buddha image is being worshipped as that of a Hindu deity and even the fact that it was originally a Buddha image seems to have been forgotten. It is quite reasonable to conclude that these two images at Kiliroor and Nilamperoor must have been installed at the orders of Bana Perumal when he was spending his last days there.

The presence of Buddhist images at both Kiliroor and Nilamperoor, the two places where the Perumal is believed to have spent his last days, the name Pallivanavar by which the Kiliroor image is known, and the very close resemblance between the bronze images at Kiliroor and Nilamperoor lead to the obvious conclusion that Palli Bana Perumal was a Buddhist. The conversion mentioned in the *Keralolpathi* must have been Bana's conversion to Buddhism.

It is quite possible that the perumal after his conversion to Buddhism became interested in Christianity also. The Christian priests or missionaries must have approached the Perumal during his stay at Nilamperoor and made him interested in their religion. This explains the cross on the statuette discovered at Nilamperoor. Having become a Bauddha once, it did not matter much, if he became interested in another Bauddha margam.

We have discussed above in great detail all the theories about the conversion of the two Perumals. In the light of the new evidences examined above we can come to the conclusion that only Bana Perumal became a Bauddha and that the Bauddha margam adopted by him was nothing else than Buddhism.

CHAPTER IV

BUDDHIST VESTIGES IN TRAVANCORE.

The Buddhistic Inscription of Varaguna.

SOUTH Travancore seems to have been a stronghold of Buddhism even as late as the 9th Century A .D. By this time the decline of Buddhism had bocome marked throughout South India, but we have some strong evidences to prove its popularity in South Travancore. A pure Buddhistic inscription of a king by name Varaguna in South Travancore has been discovered; this inscription is the only one in the whole of Kerala which makes a direct and clear reference to the prevalence of the Buddhistic religion.

This inscription is engraved on two copper plates which are the last ones of a set, the first portion of which is lost.[1] The first side of the first plate contains the end of the Tamil portion of the document which is lost. The second side of the first plate and both sides of the second plate are in Sanskrit. According to Mr. Gopinatha Rao, the alphabet of the Tamil portion resembles the early Chola and later Pallava records while the Sanskrit part is in Nagari of the type that is employed in the Mahavali inscription of the Atiranachandesvara cave temple. The Tamil portion gives the boundaries and other such details of the land that was granted. The second part of the record in Sanskrit begins with an invocation to the Buddha, son of Suddhodana, the Dharma and the Sangha. The following are the relevant passages from the inscription.[1]

1. This incription was found in the house of the Paliathu Achen. It was translated and edited by Mr T. A. Gopinatha Rao and published as No. XII of the Travancore Archaeological series in 1912.

"Om! be it well. He who is himself full of happiness who manifests the condition of the Kalpaka tree, from whom having risen the sun of the right path dispels darkness, at whose feet seeking refuge, all kinds of living beings become happy *may he the son of Suddhodan support all the three worlds like another Meru.*

"Averse to the assumption of the nature of the self (unable to perceive their own form) bearing the forehead mark called 'apanga' as an adornment (casting sportive side glances listening daily to the Dharma without satiety always and without cessation extending up to the ears) possessing knowledge of various kinds (perceiving multifarious forms) and victorious throughout the globe (surpassing in beauty the blue lily) *may the Dharma and the Sangha be for a long time, like two eyes to the goddess* Earth who is infested with the darkness of all bad religions.

"Brilliant as if well washed and purified by the flood of the nectar of mercy flowing out, *may the moon-like radiance of the Buddha long grant prosperity to us his worshippers*"

The date of the inscription is given as "Thursday in the Mrigasirsha Nakshatra in the month of Paushiya when the sun was in the Makara rasi". Mr. L. D. Swamikannu Pillai has calculated the date as Thursday 30th December A. D. 868.

Who is Varaguna?

The name of the king is given merely as Varaguna. However he cannot be mistaken for the Pandya king of that name because the inscription makes it clear that he belonged to the Vrishni dynasty.

1. T. A. S. XII. PP. 192—193. 1912 Edition See Appendix III for the full text of the inscription

There is mention of a king by name Vikramaditya Varaguna in the Travancore Huzur office Plate No. II.[1] There are some strong grounds for identifying the Varaguna of our inscription with this Vikramaditya Varaguna. Mr. Gopinatha Rao himself has suggested the possibility of such an identification.

Huzur Office Plate No. II contains a complete document belonging to the 8th year of the reign of king Vikramaditya Varaguna. Let us examine this inscription and see what light it throws on Varaguna and his family. According to this inscription, while the king Vikramaditya Varaguna was sojourning at Tirunandikkara, Murugan Sendi (that is, Sendi, the daughter of Murugan) daughter of Tenganadu Kilavan was married to him. She is called *Aykula Mahadevi.* Varaguna granted a tract of land for her enjoyment and the elders of Parthivasekharapuram are bidden to protect it. There is another inscription of a king by name Ko-Kkarunandadakkar published as Huzur Office Plate No. 1[2] which makes mention of Murugan or Tenganadu Kilavan and Parthivasekharapuram. The mention of these two names in these inscriptions helps us to establish a direct relationship between Vikramaditya Varaguna and Ko-Kkarunandadakkar. The Huzur Office Plate No. I of Ko-Kkarunanda dakkar is dated the 1449087th day of the Kali era which falls in A. D. 866.[3] It records that this king gradually acquired by exchange certain lands belonging to the Sabha of Minchirai, erected there a temple for

1. Archaeological survey of Travancore. Annual Report for M. E. 1084 PP. 4-5.

2. Ibid. P. 4.

3. Ibid.

Vishnu, and named the village surrounded it Parthiva sekharapuram (the modern Parthiva puram near Minchirai in South Travancore). "He established a Vaidik school in the temple and arranged for feeding 95 students of the various Charanas of the Vedas, the Bhavishya, the Taittiriya, and the Talavakara Charanas; he also laid down rules for the conduct to be adopted by the students during their stay in the Salai (the boarding school)." The 'Ajnapti' of the record was one Sattan Murugan alias Tenganadu Kilavan.

It is quite logical to conclude that the Murugan alias Tenganadu Kilavan and Parthivasekharapuram mentioned in both the Huzur Office Plates refer to the same person and place respectively. Vikramaditya Varaguna must have been the immediate successor of Ko-Kkarunandadakkar. Varaguna is said to have married Sendi the daughter of Murugan alias Tenganadu Kilavan who is the 'Ajnapti' of the first record. Parthivasekharapuram was found by Ko-Kkarunandadakkar on the 15th day of the 9th year of his reign according to the Huzur Office Plate No. I. We find Vikramaditya Varaguna asking the elders of Parthivasekhara puram to protect the tract of land which he granted for the enjoyment of his wife. Obviously Varaguna must be the successor of Ko-Kkarunandadakkar. The time when Varaguna lived must be later than A. D. 866 because this is the year in which Parthivasekhara puram was founded. The date of the Buddhistic inscription of king Varaguna is A. D. 868 i. e. two years later than the Huzur Office Plate No. 1 of Ko-Kkarunandadakkar. It would be quite logical to conclude that the Varaguna of the Paliam Plates (Buddhistic inscription) and the Vikramaditya Varaguna of the Huzur Office Plate No. II are the same. Otherwise

we will have to say that there were two kings by the name Varaguna, ruling at the same time in the same place. This is clearly absurd. Also it can be undoubtedly stated that Vikramaditya Varaguna was the immediate successor of Ko-Kkarunandadakkar. Therefore the author of the Buddhistic inscription (Paliam Plates) which we have quoted in the beginning of this chapter may be stated to be king Vikramaditya Varaguna, successor of Ko-Kkarunandadakkar.

But this identification of Varaguna is not sufficient by itself. We have to investigate further and see over which tract of territory Varaguna ruled and what the status of his dynasty was. Varaguna is described as a member of the Vrishni dynasty. Also the inscriptions describe him as the "best of kings the greatest of the Yadava kings." In the Huzur Office Plate No. I of Ko-Kkarunandadakkar also there is a reference to the "Yadavakula." In the Huzur Office Plate No. II of Varaguna, Varaguna's wife is called Ay-kula Mahadevi. There are many South Indian inscriptions which make reference to the Ay chieftains. The country which the Ay chieftains ruled has been identified with a tract of territory in the eastern border of the Travancore State with Aykkudi as its capital by Mahamahopadhyaya V. Swaminatha Iyer. But Mr. Gopinatha Rao and many other scholars are not disposed to accept this identification. They are inclined to believe that the Ay chieftains ruled over Venadu in South Travancore. Aykkudi is an insignificant village near Shengottai and it does not show any vestiges of an ancient capital. Mr. Gopinatha Rao says: "The utter absence of even the smallest trace of antiquities, not even a comparatively old temple with a few old inscriptions, clearly indicates that this insignificant

village could not have been the capital of a race of kings, who passed for one of the seven great 'Vallals' (Maha datas, great givers) of the Tamil land................ Today it possesses not even a mound of earth covering the debris of some old structure, temple or traces of fort wall etc; it is not also situated in any favourable position as on the bank of a fairly big river, near a strong mountain chain etc. to deserve according to the notion of the early Hindus, being the capital of a Kingdom."[1] Further, the *Purananuru* describes the Ay country to be very near the Pandya mountain.[2] But this Aykkudi, of which Mr. Swaminatha Iyer speaks, is at a distance of more than 35 miles from the Pandya mountains.

Dr. Caldwell in his comparative Grammar of Dravidian Languages describes the town of "Kottaru" as "the country of the Aii." This 'Aii' evidently refers to the chieftains of the Ay family. Kottaru in South Travancore is the same as "Venadu" the ancestoral country of the modern rulers of Travancore. The Ay chieftains were thus the rulers of ancient Venadu in South Travancore, which later developed into the modern state of Travancore.[3] Vikramaditya Varaguna the author of our Buddhistic inscription was thus a prince of Venadu ruling towards the close of the 9th Century A. D.

King Varaguna's deep devotion to Buddhism requires no other proof than the inscription we have quoted in this chapter. He calls himself and his subjects as worshippers of the Buddha and prays to him to grant

---

1. T. A. S. (1912) No. XII. P. 188.
2. *Purananuru*. Stanzas 127—135.
3. T. A. S No. XII. P. 188.

prosperity to them. Varaguna's ancestors seem to have been orthodox Hindus. Varaguna himself speaks of the horse sacrifices which they have conducted. Ko-kkarunandadakkar was undoubtedly a worshipper of Vishnu because Huzur office Plate No. I says that he erected a temple for Vishnu and granted lands for the maintenance of the Puja and made arrangements for an annual 7-days festival. At the end of the inscriptions there is also a Sanskrit verse in praise of Vishnu[1] - It is not surprising that Ko-Kkarunandadakkar was an ardent worshipper of Vishnu and his successor Varaguna was a devotee of the Buddha. There are many such instances in the history of royal dynasties in the South and the North.

There is one indication in this inscription about the nature of Buddhism followed by Varaguna—whether it was Hinayana or Mahayana. The inscription mentions the Trisarana in the order of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and this is an indication of Hinayanism. The Hinayanists always worship the Buddhist Triad in the order of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, that is the promulgator of the Law first, the Law second and the recepients of the Law last. But Mahayanists change the order into Dharma, Buddha and Sangha attributing the first and highest place to the Law and the next higher place to the promulgator of the Law.[2] According to the Mahayanists Dharma is the highest object in Buddhism and the Buddha is only the means for obtaining that knowledge. So they mention the Dharma first. Since this inscription observes the Hinayanist order, we may conclude that Varaguna and his subjects were followers of Hinayanism.

1. Archaeological survey of Travancore Annual Report for the year M. E. 1084. P. 4.
2. Buddhist Iconography—B. Bhatacharya. Introduction. P. 14-15

Mavelikkara is an ancient town in central Travancore nearly ten miles from the sea coast. A Buddha image made of granite nearly 2½ feet in height has been discovered in a compound very near the Travellers' Bungalow at Mavelikkara. For a long time it was lying neglected here, but two decades ago it was installed in a very conspicuous place on the side of the road in front of the Sri Krishnaswamy Temlpe at Kottakkakam, Mavelikkara. The image is in a yery good state of preservation and it is a common sight at Mavelikkara to see Hindu devotees offering milk, plantains and flowers to this image. It is being regularly bathed and may be said to be the best-cared-for Buddhist image in the state.

The Mavelikkara Buddha,

Artistically it is one of the most perfect images of the Buddha in South India. The *Ushnisha*, *Jvala* and the upper cloth are very conspicuous in the image. The upper cloth which is worn in the *upavita* fashion comes behind the body and the left arm[1] The Buddha is seen in the *Dhyanamudrai* with the hands resting in the lap and the back of the right hand lying in the palm of the left.

Bharanikkavu is a village five miles south of Mavelikkara town. In a thatched shed near the Bhagavati temple—outside the temple compound—we can see an image of the Buddha closely resembling the Buddha image at Mavelikkara in the style of architecture. Measuring about two feet in height, the image very elegantly executed, shows the Buddha in the usual meditative posture with a gentle smile on his

The Bharanikkavu Buddha.

1. T. A. S. Vol. ii. P. 122.

lips. The *Ushnisha* and the *Jvala* on the head, and the upper cloth passing over the left shoulder and lying flat on the chest are conspicuous features of the image. The soles of the feet are turned upwards and the hands rest in the lap in the characterstic *Dhyanamudrai.*

The image is now being worshipped by the local Hindus—particularly the Ilavas—as that of a Hindu deity.

Pallikkal Puthrachen.

Pallikkal is a village in the Kunnathur Taluk, nearly seven miles from Adoor town. A headless image of the Buddha measuring about two feet in height was discovered in the village and later it was transferred to the Trivandrum Museum. The Museum authorities have improvised a new head for the Buddha and it is now kept in the Archaeological section. The characterstic feature of this image is that it is in the *Padmasana* pose. The petals of the lotus are sculptured in low relief (both the *Adhahpadma* and the *Urdhvapadma*) and the cloth worn by the image is shown running over the two ankles, the chest and the shoulder.[1] The folded portion of the cloth is thrown on the left shoulder, just as in the Bharanikkavu image and is seen lying on the chest.

This image is popularly known as "Pallikkal Puthrachen". The word Puthrachen may be interpreted as a corruption of the words 'Buddhar Achen' or the great Buddha Priest. "Achen" is a term of respect used by the Hindus in Kerala to refer to father and by the Christians to refer to the priest. The

---

1. Ibid.

Buddhists in ancient Kerala must have used the term Achen to refer to the Buddha and thus the image must have come to be called "Buddhar Achen" or "Puthrachen." It is significant to remember that the word "Achen" is Pali in origin.[1] There is a plot of ground very near the place at which the Buddha image was discovered known as Puttar Kadu and a tank near place known as Puttar Kulam. Undoubtedfy the term "Puttar" in both these words stands for Buddhar or the Buddha.

The Karunagapalli Buddha.

Karunagappalli is a taluk lying on the bus route between the two commercial towns of Quilon and Alleppey. There is a granite image of the Buddha housed in an unostentatious shed on the right side of the main road at Karunagappalli as one proceeds towards the north. It was discovered in a tank in a village called Maruthurkulangara two miles from the town and was subsequently removed to the shed on the road side. Traces of the upper cloth passing across the chest are quite visible in the image. The Buddha is shown in the usual *Dhyanamudrai* with the soles of the feet turned upwards and the hands resting in the lap. It is about 3 feet in height.

The Hindus of the place do not seem to be showing much interest in offering worship at this image.

Karumadi Kutten.

Ten miles from Alleppey in the Ambalpula taluk there is a small village called Karumadi surrounded by vast stretches of brackish water and fertile paddy fields. There is a black stone figure to the south of the bridge across the public canal, popularly known as "Karumadi Kutten." For a long period this image was lying

---

1. *Bhasha Sahitya Chritram* Vol. I.—R. Narayana Panikkar. P. 42.

immersed in lake water, but now it is placed on a masonry pedestal on the bank. The image is about three feet in height and is seated in the *Yogasana* posture. The *Ushnisha* and the *Jvala* on the head and traces of upper cloth passing over the chest clearly prove that it is a Buddhist image [1]. "Kutten" seems to have been a popular term in ancient Kerala to refer to stone images. There is a Jaina image at Kallil known as "Kallil Kutten".

Kiliroor Pallivanavar.

We have already made mention of this image in the chapter, "The Perumal who became a Bauddha." This is the only image of the Buddha which is seen carved in the wall in half-relief. It is seen housed in a dark room in a tiled shed on the south side of the Bhagavati shrine at Kiliroor—a village near Kottayam. The Buddha is seen in the usual *Dhyana* pose under a Bhodi tree. No worship is being offered at this image.

In the front room of the same shed at Kiliroor there is a bronze image of the Buddha measuring about one and a half feet in height. It is seen on a pedestal surmounted by a superstructure giving the appearance of a *Simhasana(?)* A tree is shown sculptured behind the pedestal. The Buddha is shown in the characteristic meditative pose with the hands in the lap and the soles of the feet facing upwards. The

1. There are many stories about the origin of this image. According to one, Karumadi Kutten was a *Pariah* by caste, who was converted into stone by the curse of a holy brahmin. Another story says that he was one of the diabolical deities deputed by the Chieftain of Chengannoor to kill Devanarayana the brahmin king of Ambalapula. The God of Ambalapula made him a stone and fixed him up us Karumadi Kutten. It is indeed strange that local traditions do not in any way indicate the Buddhistic origin of this image.

peculiar feature of the image is that it is made of bronze while all the other images we have mentioned above are in stone.

Nilamperoor Buddha.

In the chapter entitled "The Perumal who became a Bauddha" we have made mention of a Bhagavati temple at Nilamperoor and a Bauddha image in a small shed adjacent to the temple. The most arresting feature of the Buddha image is that it resembles in every respect the bronze image of the Buddha at Kiliroor. From the close similarity of the measurements and the style of architecture of the two images we can conclude that one was made in imitation of the other. The presence of this Buddha image is not known even to the village folk of Nilamperoor. They are inclined to worship it as the image of God Vishnu.

Some observations on the Buddhist images of Travancore.

We have discussed above about seven or eight Buddha images which have been discovered in the various parts of Travancore. There are some authors who think that because we find only very few Buddhist vestiges in the country Buddhism must have had only a limited sphere of influence. But the smallness of the number of Buddha images cannot lead us to such a conclusion. We can never say that there are only a few Buddha images in Kerala because we have discovered only a few. It is the humble opinion of the author of this thesis that if a thorough search is made in the ancient temples of Kerala we will be able to bring to light many more Buddhist images and other vestiges. Till very recently all the Buddhist images we have mentioned above have been lying unnoticed in temple tanks or in obscure sheds within the temple

walls. Many Buddhist images must be now passing off as the images of Hindu deities. For example, the Kiliroor and Nilamperoor images are even now being worshipped as images of Vishnu or Bhagavati. It is quite possible that some of the Buddha images are now passing off as images of Sasta. When Buddhism declined in Kerala Buddha images were either removed from the temples and thrown outside or kept in obscure places within the temple precincts. In some cases these images would have been accepted as those of Hindu Gods and renamed after them. If a research worker who will have no religious difficulties in entering the Hindu temples takes up this task, he may be able to discover many more Buddhist vestiges.

One interesting feature about the places where Buddha images have been discovered is that we find temples dedicated to Bhagavati there. At Bharanikkavu, Karumadi, Kiliroor and Nilamperoor—where we have discovered Buddhist images either within temples or very near them — the deity worshipped is Bhagavati. It is possible that Bhagavati worship became very popular after the decline of Buddhism in the country.

Another interesting fact about the places where Buddha images have been discovered is the association of the term "Palli" with them. The place where the Buddha image was seen at Bharanikkavu is called "Pallikkal." The Kunnathur Buddha image popularly known as "Puthrachen" was discovered at a place called "Pallikkal." The Karunagapalli Buddha image was discovered in a tank known as "Pallikkal-Kulam" There is a Nayar house very near this tank called "Pallikkal Veedu." The place where the Bharanikkavu

Buddha image was discovered is known as Bharanikkavu Pallikkal. The Kiliroor image is known as Pallivanavar and the place where the Nilamperoor temple is situated is called Perinjanathu Pallikkal. The accountants in both the Kiliroor and Nilamperoor temples are called Palli Menon. The association of the term Palli with all these places of Buddhistic importance cannot be an accident. According to the author of the *Bhashasahitya Charitram* Palli is of Pali origin.[1] Obviously in ancient Kerala Palli was used to refer to places of Buddhistic importance.

The majority of the Buddha images discovered are from Central Travancore, especially from Mavelikkara and its neighbouring places (for example: Bharanikkavu, Pallikkal, Karunagappalli etc). The fact that so many Buddhist images are found in one small geographical area leads us to the obvious conclusion that Central Travancore was a great centre of Buddhist activities in ancient Kerala.

Now we shall proceed to examine the style and architecture of the Buddhist images in Travancore. Buddha images are generally seen in South India and Ceylon in three positions. (1) Standing (2) Sitting (3) Reclining.[2] In Travancore all the images discovered are in the sitting pose. Sitting figures are always cross legged with the soles of the feet turned upwards. This style is very common in the images discovered in Ceylon. It is said to be a device of the sculptor to

---

1. *Bhashasahitya Charitram.* Vol. I. R: Narayana Panikkar. P. 42.

2. Notes on Buddhist images in Ceylon. W. Knight James. I. A. Vol. XIII. Buddha Vestiges in Kanchipurah—T. A. Gopinatha Rao. I. A. Vol. XLIV.

show the Mangalalakkhanas or auspicious marks of which the Buddha was said to have had 108 on his feet..[3]

The hands generally rest in the lap, the back of the right hand lying in the palm of the left. It is interesting to note that in all the images we find the same *Dhyanamudrai*. In some of the Buddha images in Ceylon where the Buddha is shown in the sitting pose, the hands are separated, the right one resting on the thigh close to the knee and the left one placed on the sole of the right foot (*Bhumisparsa mudra*). But we don't come across this *Mudra* in any of the images discovered in Travancore.

The Buddha is represented as wearing the mendicant's robe. In most images the robe is thrown over the left shoulder, leaving the right one bare. In Buddhist books the Buddha is spoken of as wearing his robe over both shoulders when preaching or walking abroad, and over one shoulder only when in retirement. Since the Buddha images in Travancore show him only in the meditative mood the robe is seen generally on one shoulder only.

We don't know why the Buddha is not shown in the standing and reclining poses. The sitting pose - and that in the *Dhyanamudrai* - seems to have been the most popular style in ancient Kerala.

It is not possible to decide with accuracy the date of these images. Judging from their uniform style of architecture we may conclude that they were instituted more or less at the same time. We have assigned to the Kiliroor and Nilaperoor images a period in the

3. I. A. Vol. XIII. P. 14.

first half of the 4th century - A. D. (see chapter entitled "The Perumal who became a Bauddha.") The stone images must have been instituted at a time when Buddhism must have been very popular in the country. Yuan Chuang in his travels refers to the declining state of Buddhism in Malakuta in the 7th century A.D. It would not be wrong if we conclude that these images were instituted earlier than the 7th century A. D.

CHAPTER V.

SRIMULAVASAM—A FAMOUS BUDDHIST CENTRE OF ANCIENT KERALA.

THE *Mushikavamsa* makes mention of a famous Buddhist Vihara at a place called Srimulavasam. From the evidences we gather from the *Mushikavamsa* and other sources Srimulavasm appears to have been an important centre of Buddhist activities reputed all over India. The location of Srimulavasam is a knotty problem, but before we take up this question let us examine the historical evidences about the importance of this place as a Buddhist centre.

The *Mushikavamsa* attempts to present the history of a kingdom called Mushika or Mushaka. Vikramarama a Mushika king is said to have saved the famous Buddhist temple at Mulavasa from the encroachment of sea by throwing large blocks of stone and strengthening the shore. The Kavya says that in the reign of Vikramarama son of Ripurama the sea began to encroach upon the land and was almost submerging the temple.[1] Evidently the temple was situated on the seashore. Valabha another king of this dynasty is described to have visited the Buddhist shrine at Mulavasam and worshipped the Lord of the temple and received the blessings of the Buddhist saints of that place.[2] The temple is referred to as "the rich and flourishing temple of Sugata (Buddha) at the holy and righteous town of Mulavasa". Srimulavasam appears to have gained a great reputation as a Buddhist centre

1. *The Mushikavamsa* — Sarga XII'
2 Ibid Sarag XIV.

even in distant places like Gandhara. Monsieur Foucher discovered an image of Lokeswara at Gandhara bearing the inscription "Dkshina patha Mulavasa Lokanatha" and this is sufficient evidence to show the great esteem in which the Buddhist vihara at Mulavasa was held throughout the Buddhist world. "If a duplicate of the image of Lokeswara was set up for worship even in such a distant country as Gandhara, there is not the least doubt about the sanctity with which the original was held by the Bauddhas all over the world."[1]

We find another reference to Srimulavasa in the famous Buddhist inscription of King Vikramadithia Varaguna of the Venadu dynasty (868 A. D.).[2] Varaguna an ardent devotee of the Buddha had granted extensive landed property to this temple. The inscription gives the name of the donee of the grant as Battaraka of Tirumulapatham.[3] The fact that kings of both the Venadu and Mushika dynasties were patronising this temple and that it was well known even at distant Gandhara are sufficient to prove its importance as a Buddhist centre in ancient times.

Mr. Gopinatha Rao is inclined to believe that Srimulavasam must have been situated on the sea-coast somewhere in central Travancore—near Tirukunnapula or Ambalapula. He has drawn this conclusion from the fact that "all the Buddha images are found in central Travancore". Referring to the famous temple at Srimulavasam he says, "The presence of such an all important temple of Buddha must necessarily have induced people to erect more temples to this deity in all the adjacent parts and this might account for a

1. T. A. S. Vol. II P. 117.
2. Vide chapter on Buddhist vestiges in Travancore.
3. T. A. S. Vol. I P. 189.

number of images all of which are found practically in one place, near Srimulavasam.[1] " Mr. Gopinatha Rao would like to locate Srimulavasam near Tirukunnappula a place on the sea shore in central Travancore. From an inscription found in the Vishnu temple adjoining the temple of Sasta at Tirukunnapula, it is learnt that the structure of the temple originally stood on the sea coast and that finding that it was in danger of being washed away by the sea an ancestor of Idappalli Raja dismantled it and reconstructed it in the place where it is now found.[2] " This statement clearly shows " he says " that even within recent times the sea had been encroaching upon land near Tirukunnappula and that it must have swallowed the Srimulavasam Buddha temple some centuries ago". Of course Tirukunnappula satisfies the condition that it is on the sea shore. It is also a fact that many Buddha images are found in central Travancore. But there are some good evidences in the *Mushikavamsa* to prove that Srimulavamsam must have been somewhere in North Malabar and not in central Travancore. Let us examine these evidences.

The name Mushika or Mushaka as applied to a country is found both in inscriptions and literature. In the 2nd century B. C., the Kalinga king Kharavela is said to have invaded the Mushika country which lay to the west of Kalinga.[3]

The Mushikas are described as Kalingas in the *Bharata natya sastra.*[4] In the *Vishnu purna* Mushika is mentioned along with several other kingdoms of the

---

1. T. A. S. Vol II P. 117.
2. Ibid.
3. Journal of the Bihar Research Society, Vol. I. P. 425.
4. Ibid P. 148.

Vindhia regions. But in the Maha kutar Pillar Inscription (A. D. 601) of the Western Chalukyan king Mangalisa Rana Vikranta, Mushika is mentioned along with the Kerala, Ganga, Pandya, Dramila and Chola countries. From the proximity of these countries to the Mushika country it must be inferred that it was somewhere in the southern regions. Mr. K. V. Subramania Iyer thinks that in the early days the Mushika territory was located near the Vindhia mountains and that by "some stress of events the Mushikas were obliged to leave their country and take shelter in the mountain fastness of the south."[1] But there is no sufficient historical data to warrant any such conclusion. The Mushikas of the south must have been an independent dynasty having no connections with any dynasty known by this name in the Vindhia regions or else where.

The *Keralolpathi* mentions Mushika as one among the four divisions of Malanadu. According to one version of the *Keralolpathi* the Mushika kingdom extended from Kannetti to Cape Comorin, while according to another it extended from Perumbula to Puthppattanam. If we accept the former view the Mushika kingdom would include the territories ruled by Vikramadithia Varaguna the famous Buddhist king of South Travancore. We have already referred to his copper plate grant in which mention is made of Srimulavasam. It may be natural to conclude that Srimulavasam was within his dominions as he is said to have given extensive territories to the Buddhist temple there. But this inference is certainly wrong as will be evident from what we are going to state below.

The Mushika king Valaba is said to have marched southwards to reach the Kerala country. Ramaghata

---

1, J. R. A. S. 1922 P, 166.

the Mushika king heard that the king of Kerala had started out to oppose the Chola king who was invading his country and to assist the former he sent his nephew Valaba. After making obeisance to his uncle and obtaining his permission, Valaba proceeded southwards to join the king of Kerala. The journey is described as a long and tedious one which had to be done in several stages. [1] While camping on his way, a messenger brought the news of his uncle's death and the usurpation of one Vikramarama. Valaba proceeded straight against the usurper. On his way back he worshipped at the famous temple of Srimulavasam. From this account it is clear that the Mushika kingdom was at considerable distance north of the Kerala kingdom. Valaba, inspite of a "long and tedious journey which had to be done in several stages," had not reached the Kerala kingdom. He returns north to his capital and on his way worships at Srimulavasam. This description of Valaba's journey to the south is sufficient evidence to prove that Srimulavasam was situated many miles north of the Kerala kingdom. Even though the name Kerala is now used to refer to the whole of the Malayalam-speaking area, in ancient days it had only a very limited application. It was only one of the many geographical divisions into which ancient Malanadu was divided. It is now a generaly recognised fact that Muziris or Cranganore was the capital of ancient Kerala. The Mushika kingdom and the Buddhist centre Srimulavasam must have been many miles north of Cranganore.

The territories at present comprising North Malabar were originally ruled by kings of the Kolathu-

---

1. The *Mushikavamsa* Sarga XIV.

nadu dynasty and it is proper to identify the Mushika kingdom with the Kolathunadu territory. The *Mushika-vamsam* mentions Kolam on the bank of the river Prathana as the capital of the kingdom. This can be identified as Pandalayani Kollom in North Malabar. Marco Polo describes a kingdom called "Eli towards the west about 300 miles from Comari."[1] It is a conspicuous hill forming a promontory about sixteen miles north of Cannanore. Some scholars think that the Tamil-Malayalam equivalent being Eli, the country indicated by this term must be the tract of land surrounding the Elimalai hill. Eli certainly means rat, but sometimes the term is written as eli which means seven. Eli malai may then mean seven hills. In fact Elimalai is also called in local legends as "Sapta shaila" or the seven hills. We cannot definitely say whether the original name of the hill was Elimalai or Elimalai. Whether the reference to rat is correct or not, from the geographical details mentioned in the Mushikavamsa the Mushika country can be unmistakably located in the territory surrounding the Elimalai hill.[2]

From the evidences we have stated above we can safely conclude that Srimulavasam was a flourishing Buddhist centre in the territories of the ancient Kolathunadu princes. But it is not possible to point

---

1. Travels of Marco Polo. Yule Vol. II. P. 385.

2. The earliest mention on record of the hill is perhaps in the Indian segment of the Roman maps called the Pentingerian Tables. The Eli Maide of the Tables is not unlikely an indication of Ely or Eli". H. of K. Vol I. PP 14-15. Abulfeda describes it as a great mountain projecting into the sea, Rashiduddin mentions the country of Hili. Ibn Batuta speaks of 'Hili' as a great and well-built city situated on a large estuary accessible to great ships. The state of "Hili Marawi" is also mentioned in the Aarbic work Tuhfat-al-Mujahidin.

out any pace in modern Malabar as representing this ancient site. The *Mushikavamsam* clearly says that the Buddhist Vihara was in danger of being washed out by the sea. King Vikrama protected it from the encroachment of the sea by throwing large blocks of stone. It is quite possible that in the time of one of his successors Srimulavasam was washed off by the sea. The kings of the Mushika dynasty followed different religions at different times. We find from the Kavya that the Mushika kings were patronising shrines of Siva, Vishnu and the Buddha. There seems to have been complete cordiality and amity between the followers of the different religious sects. The *Mushikavamsam* says that religions with dreadfully opposed doctrines flourished harmoniously in the Mushika country.[1] Kings like Vikramarama and Valaba were great patrons of Buddhism. Probably in the time of one of their successors no proper care was taken to protect the shrine. Srimulavasam seems to have been in a very flourishing state towards the close of the 9th century, when the Ay king Varaguna made a gift of lands to the temple. Mr. Gopinatha Rao sa ys that Srimulavasam must have perished in or about the first quarter of the 11th century. The Mushika king Valaba is said to have marched south to help the Kerala king who was attacked bp the Chola king. The earliest Chola kings who attacked the Chera dominions are Rajaraja I and his son Rajendra Chola. It is likely that the Chola aggressor of the Kerala country in the time of Valaba was Rajendra Chola; Srimulavasam must have perished by the 11th century A. D.

---

1. " Just as the proverb goes that the asram of those great beings who have attained the siddhis, beasts naturally inimical to each other live so in harmony in the country of Mushika religions with dreadfully opposed doctrines flourished harmoniously " Sarga XII.

Referring to the town of Madavi or Madai in the country of Eli, Colonel Yule says that a "Buddhist vihara is spoken of in an old Malayalam poem as having existed at the place." Unfortunately we do not know the particular Malayalam song sefereed to here. Can the reference to the Buddhist vihara be to the famous Buddhist temple of Srimulavasam.[1] ?

---

1. Al Biruni (970-1039) mentions the country of Eli and says the people there were samanas, by which he must have meant Bauddhas. Marco Polo, visiting Eli nearly three centuries later described the people as idolaters. By the 13th century Buddhism must have been completely replaced by Brhaminism all over the Malabar coast.

CHAPTER VI.

CHINESE TRAVELLERS ON KERALA BUDDHISM.

Yuan Chwaung on Buddhism in 'Malakuta'.

For the study of Buddhism in South India Yuan Chwang's 'Travels' are the most helpful among the Chinese accounts. But there are serious differences of opinion among scholars about the identification of some of the places mentioned by the pilgrim. The Chinese traveller spells the names of the strange places he visited in India in his own way and this has given scope for various interpretations. The most controversial among the accounts given by the pilgrim is the one realating to a region which hs calls 'Mo-lo-kuta' or Malakuta. Various interpretations have been put forward by many eminent scholars, but the identification of Malakuta still remains a subject of controversy. An examination of the various theories will convince us that the consensus of scholarly opinion is in favour of the view that the pilgrim's Malakuta included Malabar also.

The following are the main facts in the pilgrim's account of Malakuta :—[1]

(1) The country was 3000 li or so south of Kanchipura. (2) It was about 5000 li in circuit; (3) the capital was about 40 li, the soil brackish and barren, the temperature hot and the men dark-complexioned, but firm and imperious in disposition. Some followed the true doctrine, other were given to heresy.

1. Pr. O. C. (1930) "Malakuta of Yuan Chwang" by Prof. K. A. N. Sastri. P. 173.

They did not esteem learning much, but were wholly given to commercial gain. Hinduism and Jainism (Nigranthas) were more flourishing than Buddhism of which many old convents were in ruins including one built by Mahendra not far to the east of the capital (4) On the south of this country bordering the sea are the Mo-la-ye (Malaya) mountains on which is found the white sandal wood tree. (5) To the east of the Malaya mountains is Mt. Po-ta-lo-kia (Potalaka), on the top of which is a lake; its waters are clear as a mirror. From a hollow proceeds a great river which encircles the mountain twenty times as it flows down and them enters the southern sea. (6) Going north-east from this mountain, on the border of the sea is a town whence they start for the southern sea and the country of San-kia-lo (Ceylon). Simhala is commonly said to be 3000 li to the south-east of this port.

The crucial question for our discussion is whether Yuan Chwang's Malakuta included Malabar or not. Mr. Watters is very sceptical about the wisdom of accepting the statements of the pilgrim as correct. He says that the geographical names given by the pilgrim might have been drawn by him from his knowledge of Buddhist literature and that it may not always be possible to find geographical equivalents satisfying all the conditions of the narrative concerning Malakuta. Similarly most of the scholars are of opinion that the directions and distances given by the pilgrim cannot be accepted as correct. Yuan Chwang gives his measurements of distance with a great show of accuracy in 'li'; but the difficulty lies in ascertaining what 'li' he used. The value of the 'li', it is said, has varied enormously in China at different

periods.[1] Dr. Burnell points out that it is unsafe to attach any great value to these distances given by the pilgrim as it is obvious that he could have had no means of accurately determining the distances he travelled and that he must have used round terms. It is interesting however to note how different scholars have made use of the vagueness and inaccuracies in the pilgrim's accounts to support their own theories.

The general view about the identification of Malakuta was that it comprised the Pandyan Kingdoms of the south and some regions of the west coast. But Dr. Burnell disputed this theory and put forward a new theory identifying Malakuta with a part of the Tanjore District round about the modern town of Kumbakonam. We may briefly refer to his arguments and see how far they are acceptable. The following are his arguments:—(1) The pilgrim returned to Kanchipura from Malakuta and thence went to Konkanpura the modern Konkanahalli in Mysore. It is thus evident that Madura the extreme south of India cannot be intended by Malakuta. (2) If this be assumed to be Madura and Charitrapura be assumed to be Negapattam it is difficult to understand the statement that Charitrapura was in the north east of the kingdom. (3) The pilgrim (even making great allowances for his necessarily defective geography) could hardly have said that the Malaya mountains are south of Malakuta if the last be Madura, for if he had visited that place he would have seen them and would necessarily have put them in the west. (4) If we look at the text of the pilgrim's accounts a little more closely it will be evident that in speaking of the kingdoms of the south he did not intend that

---

1. I. A., Vol. 7, P. 40.

they should be regarded as conterminous. His kingdoms were composed of the deltas of rivers and similar fertile tracts. Thus his Dravida is the small Pallava kingdom composed of the fertile territory of the Palar valley near Kanchipuram: the next kingdom would naturally be in the delta of the Kaveri and Koleroon. (5) In the great Tamil inscriptions of Kulottunga Chola (1064-1113 A.D) in the Tanjore temple there is one inscription recording endowments made by the community (Sabhaiyar) of '*Malakuta Chudamani chaturvedi mangalam*' which is said to be in the Avurkurram of Nitta vinoda-vala-nadu. The meaning of the name of the village is plain: the Brahmanical settlement of Chaturvedi mangalam was 'Malakuta Chudamani' or an ornament of the kingdom of Malakuta. The sub division (Kurram) of Avur was in Malakuta. Avur is situated some 5 or 6 miles south west of kumbakonam. It follows therefore that Malakuta was the name of the kingdom comprised in the delta of the Kaveri.[1]

This theory of Dr. Burnell identifying Malakuta with the regions of the Kaveri delta has not been accepted by other scholars. Dr. Hultzch has refuted this theory in a very scholarly article in the Indian Antiquary. He is inclined to accept the view that Malakuta comprised the Southern Tamil kingdoms including Malabar.[2] Dr. Hultszch points out that the Tamil inscription to which Dr. Burnell refers is wrongly quoted and interpreted. He says "The reference is to an inscription of the 29th year of the Chola king Ko-Raja Kesarivarman alias Rajaraja deva and to an inscription of the 10th year of Ko-Para Kesarivarman alias Rajendra Chola deva. Each

---

1. I. A. Vol. 7. PP. 39-40.
2. I, A. Vol. 18. PP. 239-242.

of these two inscriptions reads in clear Tamil and Granta letters of two to three inches height:—" the members of the sabha of Irumbudal alias *Manukula Chulamani*-Chaturvedi mangalam, a brahmadeya in Avur Kurram (a sub. division) of Nitta vinoda-vala-nadu." This disposes finally of the possibility of identifying Hiuen Tsiang's Mo-lo-kiu-ch'a with Kumbakonam. "

The first half of the name Malakuta according to Dr. Hultszch is the well known Dravidian word 'mala,' a hill (mala in Malayalam and malai in Tamil) and the second may be connected with 'Kurram' which means a division or more probably with 'Kottam' which means a district. Thus Malakuta would be a synonym of 'Malanadu' or 'Malai nadu' the 'hill country.' Mala nadu in Malayalam and Malai nadu in Tamil are used to refer to the country of Malabar.

The circut of the kingdom was 5000 li or 833 miles. It was bounded by the sea in the south and by the province of Dravida in the north. General Cunningham says that this estimate agrees almost exactly with the measurement of the end of the Peninsula to the south of the Kaveri river and so the province of Mala Kuta must have included the modern districts of Tanjore and Madura on the east, with Coimbatore, Cochin and Travancore on the west.[1] Dr. Hultzsch says that General Cunningham is doubtlessly right if he supposes that it must have included besides Malabar the whole southern part of the Madras Presidency beyond the Kaveri. Mr. Beal the Chinese editor remarks in a note that Malakuta was also called Chi-mo-lo. These syllables are identified with 'Tamila' (by

1. A. G. I. P. 629.

Dr. Caldwell) the name of the Tamil people.[1] The identification of the Chinese pilgrim's Malakuta with Malainadu has gained acceptance at the hands of many eminent scholars and they are inclined to concede the view that the pilgrim's travels included Malabar too. Prof. K. A. Nilakanta Sastri says: "with whatever defects of method, Cunningham must be held to have arrived at a substantially sound identification of Malaya kuta (as he renders the name) in his statement that the province of Malaya kuta must have included the modern districts of Tanjore and Madura on the east with Coimbatore, Cochin and Travancore on the west."[2] It is also pointed out that the area so indicated would roughly correspond to the Pandyan kingdom as it was in the days when the pilgrim came to south India.[3] Mr. Talboys Wheeler says "Hiuen Tsiang had proceeded to Conjeevaram along the eastern coast. In his return route he crossed the Peninsula to the western coast known as the Malabar side; and then turned towards the north through Travancore and Malabar." Dr. Pope a reputed authority on the Tamil language says that "Malakuta must be Malakotta, Malainadu, Malaya, Malayalam and included the whole southern part of the Madras Presidency, the Pandya and the Chera kingdoms".[4] Thus we can safely conclude that the Pilgrim's accounts about Malakuta refer to Malabar also.

---

1. I. A. Vol. 18. P. 241.

Malainadu. "This name means the hill country and is nowadays confined to Malayalam or Malabar.In the times of Hiuen Tsiang and of Alberuni the synonymous terms Malakotta and Malaya seem to have included besides Malabar the whole southern part of the Madras Presidency beyond the Kaveri." S. I. I. Vol. I. Part I. P. 2, Note I.

2. Pr. O. C. 1930, P. 176.

3. The Pandyan Kingdom K. A. N. Sastry Ch. V.

4. "*Naladyar*" Introduction P. X.

What was the capital of Malakuta to which the Pilgrim referred? If we accept the pilgrim's direction that Malakuta was 3000 li to the south of Kanchi it will take us out to the sea beyond Cape Comorin. [1] According to the writer of the 'Life' the distance of 3000 li is said to be from the frontiers of Dravida. But this would only increase the difficulty because we will have to place the capital of Malakuta still further to the south. M. Julien quotes the Si-yu-ki as fixing the distance at 300 li Instead of 3000 li. General Cunningham says that if we accept it is 300 li from the frontiers of Dravida the capital of Malakuta can be fixed at Madura. Again if we accept it as 1300 li instead of 3000 li from the capital of Dravida we can fix it to be Madura. Various other names have been put forward as the capital of Malakuta. Cunningham himself suggests that it is possible that 'Kaulam' (Quilon in Travancore) may have been the capital at the time of the pilgrim's visit. "To the north east of the capital there was a town called 'Caritra pura' or Departure town, which was the port of embarkation for Ceylon. If Madura was the capital, the port city was probably Negapattam; but if 'Kaulam' was the capital the city must have been Ramnadu. (Ranatha pura). From this port Ceylon was distant 3000 li or 500 miles to the South east." But this suggestion of Quilon as the capital of Malakuta does not seem to be very reasonable.

1. Mr. S. N, Majumdar is quite content to accept the 3000 li and remarks that 3000 li to the south of Kanchipuram will not take us too much to the south. "The ancient road to the south of Kanchi passed through Tirukoilur, Trichinopoly (Uriayur) Tanjore District and Kodumbai to Madura the capital of the Pandyas and this route makes up the distance of 3000 li". Pr. O. C. 1930, P. 175.

Malakuta was primarily the Pandya country, even though it included the Chera regions. Further as Cunningham himself says neither the distance nor the bearing agrees with the pilgrim's statement as the place is not more than 400 miles to the south west of Conjeevaram.

Mr. Beal identifies Chi-mo-lo (which the Chinese editor of Yuan Chwang gives as another name for Malakuta) with Kumari or Cape Comorin.[1] But it is difficult to accept this as correct as there is no tradition of a capital ever having been situated there.

Dr. Hultszch suggests that the Pilgrim's reference to the capital of Malakuta is to Korkai in the Tinnevelly District—the Korkai of the Tamil classics, and of the Periplus and of Ptolemy which was according to Dr. Caldwell the capital of the Pandyas.[1] According to Abu Rihan and his copyist Rashid-ud-din, 'Malaya' and 'Kutal' were two distinct provinces, the latter being to the south of the former and the last or most southerly district of India. According to this view "Malayakuta" is a compound name, formed by joining the names of two contiguous districts. "Thus Malaya would answer to the district of Pandya

---

1. J. R. A. S. Vol. 15 P. 337,

Mr. K. P. P. Menon says that "there is nothing improbable about it if we keep in mind that the coast line extended at one time to a long distance south of the present cape."

' In the Chino-Japanese map of India the alternative name for Malayakuta is Hai-an-naew which suggests a connection with Ptolemy's country of the 'Aioi'. Professor Wilson thinks that the 'Aioi' may stand for the Sanskrit 'ahi', a serpent, the reference embodying no doubt the local tradition mentioned in the Keralolpathi of the Nagas or serpents driving the brahmins out of Kerala." H of K Vol. I. PP. 3-4.

with the capital of Madura and Kuta or Kutal to Travancore with its capital of Kochin (?) the Kottiara of Ptolemy."

Thus we find various places being suggested by scholars as the capital of the Malakuta country. It is not possible to identify the capital of Malakuta correctly. Even though places like Madura, Quilon, 'Korkal' and Cape Comorin have been suggested by scholars of great eminence, it appears to us that these attempts at the identification of the capital of Malakuta are unwarranted. These scholars themselves have expressed the view that Malakuta consisted of more than one kingdom. According to Cunningham and Dr. Hultszch it comprised Malabar and the whole of the southern part of the Madras presidency south of the Kaveri. Thus Malakuta consisted of the Chera and Pandya kingdoms and part of the Chola regions. Therefore there could have been two or three cities of equal importance in 'Malakuta' which could pass off as capital cities. Even if we accept Madura, or Korkai or Comorin as the palce to which Yuan Chwaug made reference, it cannot be accepted as the capital of Malakuta because Malakuta was not one kingdom with one capital, but it consisted of two or three regions, probably with two or three capitals. The reference to 'Malaya' and 'Potalaka' by the pilgrim has been the subject of great controversy among scholars. According to Yuan Chwang Malakuta was bounded on the south by the Malaya Mountaius which brodered the sea and in which sandal trees were found in large numbers. To the east of the Malaya mountains was mount Potalaka on the top of which was a lake from which there flowed a great river. The term Malaya is applied to the western ghats in Sanskrit and Malayalam and sandal is called

'Malayaja' or the produce of Malaya. "In Tamil 'Malayam' or 'Malaiyam' besides being used in the same sense is the name of another mountain which is also called 'Chandanachala' or 'Chandanadu' (i. e. 'mountain of the sandal') Podigai or Podiyam which is supposed to be the residence of the sage Agastya........... Dr. Caldwell states that the source of the Tamraparni river is in the mountain Podigai. 'The Potalaka' of Yuan Chwang's accounts is identified with this Podigai by Dr. Hultzsch.[1] He says that the agreement between the two words Podigai and Potalaka is close enough to justify this identification. On this ground the river mentioned by the Chinese Pilgrim is identified with Tamraparni.[2] But Mr. Beal has expressed a view that Malaya mountain to which the pilgrim refers is in Ceylon and that Po-to-lo-kia or Potaloka refers to Adam's Peak. He says "If we suppose that Hioen Thsang speaks of the capital, Madnara and reckons south from that then we should naturally seek the mountain named in the extreme south point of the Peninsula; but I cannot help

---

1. I. A. Vol. 18. P. 241.

2. "According to Thranath's history of Buddhism Potala was the name of a mythical mountain in the south, the seat of Avalokitesvara. On the way to it the ocean, a great river, and a lake had to be crossed. This myth of the northern Buddhists must have been known to Hiuen Tsang and the change of *Podiyam* or *Podigai* into *Potala* or *Potalaka* may be due to a popular etymology which Hiuen Tsang made either unconsciously or from a desire to connect the information collected on his visit to southern India with that contained in his holy books. From similar motives either Hiuen Tsang or his Buddhist informants seem to have transformed *Agastya* who is supposed to reside on Podigai into the Bodhisattava Avalokitesvara."

I. A. Vol. 18. P. 241.

thinking he speaks of the Malaya mountain of Ceylon. We must remember he is reporting what he had heard. And this mountain Malaya in which was the celebrated cave of Asoka where the Buddhist scriptures were translated or rather committed to writing B. C. 75, is a place that would naturally be named in conversation about Buddhist matters. I am of opinion therefore that Hiouen Thsang is here speaking of the Malaya mountain of Ceylon. Next he says, east of this is Mount Pe-to-lo-kia. I think this refers to Adams Peak or Sumanakuto." [1] In further support of this theory Mr. Beal says that if we are to accept the statements of the pilgrim as correct we cannot make Potalaka a portion of the Nilgiris (Western Ghats). He argues that "3000 li to the south of Conjeevaram and still south of that and east again of this cannot bring us to the Neilgherry hills." Also, we do not know of any peak there sacred as a place of pilgrimage and the residence of a Bodhisattva or a deva with a lake on the top and a river flowing into the southern sea. Nor do we ever hear of Buddha visiting this mountainous region. So Mr Beal concludes that Malaya and Potalaka are in Ceylon.

Even though Mr. Beal has emphatically stated that Malaya and Potalaka are in Ceylon and cannot be in the Indian Peninsula in a foot note to his article he himself has suggested the possibility of an identification of Potalaka with Podigai in the Western Ghats. The foot note says "It might indeed be referred to the mountain called by Ptolemy 'Bittigo' a detached mass of the Ghats south of the Coimbatore gap apparently the true Malaya of the Pauranik mountains. The most prominent mountain in this

1. J. R. A. S. New series Vol. 15. PP. 337-338.

mass is called in Old Tamil Pothiga." But he concludes that "in the absence of information as to this mountain and considering the celebrity of Mount Potalaka we can hardly think that is so."[1]

Recent opinion however is in favour of accepting the view that Malaya of Yuan Chwang's writings refers to the Western Ghats. The identification of Potalaka with Podigai has also been accepted as correct by most of the scholars.[2] The Mo-la-ya of Yuan Chwang's accounts, with its lofty cliffs and ridges and deep valleys and gullies is undoubtedly the "Malayadri" which figures very conspicuously in ancient sanskrit and Tamil literature. When we accept this identification as correct, it is needless to seek for Potalaka in Ceylon. Yuan Chwang was perhaps misinformed when he placed the Malaya mountains to south of Malakuta. Also it is possible that he or his informants must have transformed Agastya who is supposed to reside on Podigai into a Bodhisattva.

There has been much discussion about the question whether the pilgrim actually visited the country or gave an account of it from hearsay. Mr. Watters expresses himself with great caution on

1, J. R. A. S. Vol. 15. P. 338.

2. Prof. K. A. N. Sastri observes "In Tamill literature the name Podigai or Podiyil is applied to the southern most section of the Western Ghats; and although Ptolemy seems to apply his term Bittiga to the whole section of the Western Ghats extending from the Coimbatore gap to Cape Comorin; still it is well to remember that Tamil literary usage confines the term Podigai to that section in the extreme south lying between the head waters of the Tambraparni and Cape Comorin. Thus the *Silappadikaram* mentions Podiyil and Imayam evidently as mountains in the extreme south and north of India and again refers to a pilgrim who goes round the sacred Podiyil mountain after bathing in Kumari These indications from Tamil literary usage would go a long way to justify Yuan Chwang's location of Potalaka to the south of Malakuta.". Pr. O. C. 1930. P. 178.

this subject. Referring to the statement in the life which has led to the belief that the pilgrim did not visit Malakuta. Mr. Watters says:— "As this is not very clear and as the direction is not given we should not lightly accept this statement. There is nothing in the pilgrim's account of the country to show that he did not visit it and see its capital and the district around although he may not have gone to remote objects of interest."[1] Referring to the pilgrim's description of the monastery Mr. Watters observes "The account of this monastery and its Asoka tope of which only the dome remained visible is apparently that of a visitor at the time of the description."[2] But Mr. Watters does not appear to be quite confident. He says on another occasion that it is perhaps better to regard him as writing about Malakuta and Ceylon from information given to him in Dravida and from books."[3] Commenting on these statements of Mr. Watters Prof. K. A. N. Sastri says "The halting tone of Watters' observations appears to have arisen partly from his oversight of the political condition of Southern India at the time of the pilgrim's visit. His remarks that the pilgrim does not tell us anything about the nature of the country between Dravida and Malakuta is perfectly correct, but there is nothing in this to point to the inference that he may not have gone to Malakuta."[4] It appears right to conclude that the pilgrim had actually visited the country and was not writing from hearsay. Now we shall proceed to examine the state of Buddhism in Kerala as the Chinese traveller found it.

1. "On Yuan Chwang" Vol. II. P. 229.
2. Ibid. P. 230.
3. Ibid. P. 233.
4. Pr. O. C. 1930. p. 174.

The pilgrim observes that the people of Malakuta were of 'mixed religions.' This is certainly true of Kerala. We have already noticed that even during the heyday of Buddhism in the country the Chera capital was the centre of the followers of all the known religions of South India. The most important observation the pilgrim makes about Buddhism is that it was declining. Very few monasteries were in preservation and there was only a small number of Brethren. The pilgrim's account proves that the religion had lost its hold on the people by the middle of the 7th Century A. D. The sad state of Buddhism in 'Malakuta' was in direct contrast to its flourishing position at Kanchi and other places. While the pilgrim found 100 Buddhist monasteries and 10,000 Brethren in Dravida, he found to his great dismay the monasteries of 'Malakuta' in ruins. He noticed hundreds of Deva temples flourishing in the country. Also he noticed numerous 'Niggantas' ('Nigrantas'). Dr. Burnell and others are of opinion that this is a reference to the 'Digambara Jains.' [1] But there are some scholars who consider it to be a reference to the mendicant brahmins. The Namboothiri brahmins of Malabar, they point out, are "notoriously a scantily clothed race". and his reference to Digambaras or naked heretics can

---

1. I. A. Vol. I. P. 310.

Dr. Burnell says "Hiwen Thsang who visited the Telugu and Tamil countries in 639—40 A. D. mentions that the inhabitants were chiefly Nigranthas i.e. Digambara Jains; he mentions a few Buddhists but has not a word about Brahmans." In a foot note to his article Dr. Burnell says "The Nirgranthas are generally asserted to be naked brahman mendicants, but as the Mimansists oppose them, it is difficult to see how they could be Brahmins.........That they were really Digambaras is I think proved by the Atthapahudaka Gathas in which 'Niggantha' is continually used as an epithet of true Jains."

be to these people.[1] The Namboothiries[2] were no doubt the leaders of Brahmanical revival in Malabar and as such great heretics in the eyes of the Buddhists. But it is difficult to believe that the Digambaras referred to by the Chinese traveller were the Namboodiries of Kerala. The reference is obviously to the Digambara jains.

The Pilgrim makes mention of an old monastery on the east side of the capital built by Asoka's brother Mahendra. This monastery was found in great ruins. There are no traditions in Malabar associating the name of either Asoka or of his brother with any Buddhistic institutions. So this monastery must have been outside Malabar. It is also quite possible that this story of Mahendra building a monastery was only one of the many gossips which the pilgrim carelessly included in his book.

What we gather from the accounts of Yuan Chwang is that Buddhism was steadily being replaced by its rival sects during the 7th century A. D. in 'Malakuta.'

Chau Ju-kua on Kerala Buddhism.

One of the most valuable notices of the kingdoms of South India in the middle ages is that of Chau Ju-kua the Chinese inspector of foreign trade who compiled a book called "Chu-fau-chi" about 1225 A. D.

1. H. of K. Vol. 1 P. 47.

2, Recently a very curious but interesting explanation for the word Namboothiri has been put forward by a Malayalam author (Refer "Ilava Charitam") the official history of the Ilavas, PP. 235—236). He attempts to give a Buddhistic origin to the word Namboothiri. He says that Namboothiri is derived from "Nambudeero" and asserts that the Malabar Namboothiries were originally Buddhists. It is needless to say that this is a very laboured interpretation. It would be fantastic to give a Buddhistic origin to these Aryan Brahmins who were the strongest defenders of the Brahmin faith in Malabar.

The derivation of the word Namboodiri is from Dravidian "Nambuka" (=to trust, confide) and Sanskrit affix 'tiri' (=tiru-Sri-blessed, fortunate). See M. M. D. by Logan Glossary with Notes etc. Appendix XIII.

He gives very valuable information about Malabar. After the return of Yuan Chwang to China many Chinese travellers had come to South India. I-Tsing came over to India towards the close of the 7th Century (673-695) but he did not visit Kerala or any kingdom in the South. During the last years of the 7th century and early years of the 8th century there seems to have been regular diplomatic intercourse between the Chinese emperor and the kings of south India. Vallabha the Chalukya king sent an embassy to China in 692. Narasimha Varman II the Pallava ruler of Kanchi sent an embassy to China in 720 A.D. and received one from the Chinese Emperor. There seems to have been a brisk trade between China and the South Indian kingdoms especially Malabar during the middle ages.[1] But after the departure of Yuan Chwang the first Chinese author to make a direct reference to the Buddhism of the country is Chau Ju-Kua. The editors of Chau Ju-Kua's 'Chu-fan-chi' give the following estimate about him :- "His notes to a certain extent are second hand information but notwithstanding this he has placed on record much original matter, facts and information of great interest. The large percentage of clear and simple matter-of-fact data we find in his work as compared with the improbable and incredible admixtures which we are accustomed to

1. The accounts of foreign travellers throw some light on the commercial relations between China and Kerala during the 11th and 12th centuries. Casper Correa the Portuguese traveller who came to India in 1512 and died there in 1563 makes the following observation. "By the time the Portuguese ships arrived (at Calicut in 1498) four centuries had elapsed since the year when there came more than 800 sailing ships from Malacca, China and the land of the Lequeos (Formosa)—ships great and small manned by people of various nationalities and charged with very rich merchandise which they brought for sale. They came to Calicut navigated the entire coast up to Cambay and they were so numerous that they spread themselves over the whole country." Foreign notices of S. India. P. 24.

encounter in all oriental authors of his time, gives him a prominent place among the medieval authors on the ethnography of his time, a period particularly interesting to us as it proceeds by about a century Marcopolo, and fills a gap in our knowledge of China's relations with the outside world extending from the Arab writers of the ninth and tenth centuries to the days of the great Venetian traveller "[1]

Now we shall examine the references Chau Ju-kua makes to Buddhism in Kerala. He calls Malabar the 'Nan-p'i' country which is interpreted as the country of the Nairs. He describes the ruler of the country as follows:- "The ruler of the country has his body draped, but goes barefooted. He wears a turban and a loin cloth, both of white cotton cloth. Sometimes he wears a white cotton shirt with narrow sleeves. When going out he rides an elephant and wears a golden hat ornamented with pearls and gems. On his arm is fastened a band of gold and around his neck is a golden chain." Referring to the poeple of the country he says: "They are of a dark brown complexion, the lobes of their ears reach down to their shoulders. They are skilled in archery and dexterous with the sword and lance. They love fighting and ride elephants in battle when they also wear turbans of coloured silks. *They are extremely devout Buddhists.*" Chau Ju-kua describing the inhabitants of Ku-lin or Quilon (one of the principal sea ports in ancient Kerala) says "whenever they have taken a bath they anoint their bodies with Yu-kin (turmeric) *as they like to have their bodies gilt like that of a Buddha.*"

It is difficult to accept these references to Buddhism made by the Chinese Traveller as literally true. This was nothing but "a natural confusion on

1. Foreign notices of South India. PP. 26—27.

the part of the author between Hindu and Buddhist images and forms of worship."[1] It would be quite wrong to say that Buddhism was a flourishing religion in Kerala in the 13th century. All evindences go to prove that during this period and even in the four centuries preceding this, Buddhism had declined considerably in improtance. The Brahmanic revival had brought about the steady decline of Buddhism everywhere in India. In Kerala too Buddhism had been practically replaced by the neo-brahmanism which was becoming increasingly popular. But how can we explain the categorical statement of Chau Ju-kua (whose abilities for correct observation are acclaimed by most of the scholars) that the people of the country were "extremely devout Buddhists." We can very well accept the view that the Chinese author must have mistaken the Hindu images and forms of worship to be Buddhist. But we have also to explain how such a confusion could have arisen in the author's observations. In my opinion such a confusion arose because the Hindu forms of worship in Kerala which the Chinese traveller observed were still retaining many of their Buddhistic features. The Hinduism of Kerala in the medieval period was not free from the strong influences of Buddhism which had once been the popular religion of the country. Even though Buddhism had declined in Kerala—as it did everywhere else—it had left many permanent influences on the religious life of the people. Their forms of worship, their festivals and ceremonies in the temples etc, were still predominently Buddhistic in appearance and to any outsider, especially to one who viewed things from the Buddhistic angle, these would not have appeared

1. Ibid. P. 138. Foot note No. 9.

as quite different from those of Buddhism. It was natural that in the eyes of Chau Ju-kua the people of the country appeared as " extremely devout Buddhists." It took many centuries for Kerala Hinduism to free itself from its Buddhistic influences. But Hinduism in Kerala has never attempted to completely cut off its Buddhist traits. Even to-day Hindu forms of worship retain many important Buddhistic features.

Ma Huan on Kerala Buddhism.

Ma Huan was a Chinese Muslim who accompanied Cheng Ho in his voyages to the East in the middle of the 15th century.

At the beginning of the 15th century the third Emperor of the Ming dynasty of China sent out a series of naval expeditions overseas. The most famous among the commanders of these expeditions was the eunuch Cheng Ho.[1] Cheng Ho was accompanied in these voyages by two persons whose writings are very valuable to students of History. One was Fei Hsin and the other was Ma Huan. Ma Huan was attached as interpreter to the expedition of 1412 on account of his knowledge of foreign language. Cheng Ho and Ma Huan paid more than one visit to Ceylon, Cochin and Calicut. Ma Huan's work called ' Ying-yai-Sheng-lau" or " Description of the coasts of the ocean" was published in 1451. His style was "that of an unaltered sailor prolix and lacking in literary quality". But this accounts about Malabar being those of an eye witness are very useful.

---

1. The initial motive of these embassies lay in the desire of the emperor to ascertain the whereabouts of his nephew *Kien wen* dethroned by him and suspected to have hidden himself somewhere in the countries beyond the sea. Foreign notices of South India. P. 37.

Referring to the ruler of Cochin Ma Huan observes :— "The king or ruler is of the solar race and is *a sincere believer in Buddhism*, and has the greatest reverence for elephants and oxen and *every morning at day light prostrates himself before an image of Buddha.* The king wears no clothing on the upper part of his person; he has simply a square of silk wound round his loins kept in place by a coloured waist-band of the same material and on his head a turban of yellow or white cotton cloth."

Ma Huan makes the following observations about the ruler of Calicut: "The king belongs to the Nair class and like his brother of Cochin is *a sincere follower of Buddha* and as such does not eat beef...........The king at his devotion *prostrates himself before an image of Buddha* every morning, which being over his attendants collect all the cow dung about the place and smear it over the image of the god. Some of the dung the king orders to be burnt to ashes and put into a small cotton bag which he continually wears upon his person; and when his morning ablutions are over he mixes some of the powdered dung with water and smears it over his forehead and limbs; by so doing he considers *he is showing Buddha the greatest reverence.*"

If we accept Ma Huan's accounts as literally correct, then we have to accept the view that both the king of Cochin and the Zamorin of Calicut were ardent followers of Buddhism during the middle of the 15th century. If the kings were Buddhists the majority of their subjects also would be, because in Kerala in the ancient and medieval periods the golden maxim about the people's religious and social conduct was "*Etha Raja, Tatha Praja*" ("As is the king, so are the people.") But we have no evidence other than that of Ma Huan to

prove that the Kerala rulers during this period were followers of Buddhism. All the evidences at our disposal go to prove that Buddhism had practically disappeared from Kerala by the 15th century. There were many visitors to Kerala from China after the visit of Chau Ju-kua and before the visit of Ma Huan. But none of them makes any mention of Buddhism in Kerala. Neither does any other Traveller—Arab or European—make any reference to Buddhism in any part of Kerala. Marco Polo (C 1293 A. D.) makes ample references to Buddhism in Ceylon, but when he describes the people of Kerala (*e.g.* of Quilon) he only says they were "idolaters." Frair Odoric (C 1321) of Pordenone who visited Cranganore Quilon and other places in Malabar in the 14th century makes no mention of Buddhism even though he describes in detail the forms of worship prevalent there. Friar Jordanus (1323-1330), Abulfeda (1273-1331) and Ibn Battuta (1333-1345) have left valuable accounts about the people of Malabar, but they too make no observasions on Buddhism. It can be argued that these travellers could make no distinction between Hindus and Buddhists and so the 'idolators' to whom they make reference included Buddhists too. But there are some Chinese travellers during this period who were well acquainted with Buddhism but who make no reference to the existence of that religion in Kerala. Wan Ta Yuan, a contemporary of Ibn Battuta, gives valuable accounts about 'Kain Colan' (Kayamkulam) Ku-li-fo (Calicut) and other important places in Kerala. Tei Hsin who accompanied Cheng-Ho in his travels (1346) visited Ceylon, Cochin and Calicut. But both of them have nothing to say about Budhism in Kerala. Tei Hsin makes special mention of Buddhism in Ceylon, but is silent about Buddhism in Cochin or Calicut.

How is it that Ma Huan alone speaks of the Cochin and Calicut rulers as Buddhist swhile his contemporary travellers make no such reference? If Buddhism had been a flourishing religion in Cochin and Calicut, it could not have escaped the notice of the other travellers, especially those from China. Our explanation for Ma Huan's statement is the same as that we gave for Chau Ju Kua's. Ma Huan found many striking resemblances between the forms of worship at Cochin and Calicut and the Buddhists forms of worship in China and other places of Buddhistic importance. Naturally he thought that the Kings of Cochin and Calicut were worshipers of the Buddha. It is also possible that in the temples of Cochin and Calicut which Ma Huan saw there were Buddhist images. Ma Huan says that both the Kings of Cochin and Calicut prostrated before the image of the Buddha. This need not be considered as entirely improbable or false. In many of the temples of Kerala Buddha images were retained and even now we can see Buddha images in some Hindu temples. With the revival of Hinduism the Buddha was incorporated into the Hindu Pantheon— and was considered as one of the many avatars of Vishnu. So there is nothing wrong in believing that Ma Huan saw Buddha images being worshipped by the kings of Cochin and Calicut. But this is no indication of the fact that they were Buddhists or that Buddhism was popular in Malabar during this period.

CHAPTER VII.

BUDDHISM AND SASTA WORSHIP IN KERALA.

SASTA is one of the most popular deities of Kerala. There are sasta shrines at Sabarimala, Achenkoil, Kulathupuzha and Arienkavu. But besides these there are numerous insignificant shrines in the diferent villages of Kerala dedicated to Sasta. The most popular Sasta temple is the one at Sabarimala a place in the midst of the dense Sahya mountains, fifty miles distant from the western littoral boundary of Travancore. The period from the middle of November to the middle of January is devoted by thousands of Hindu devotees in Travancore to this great forest pilgrimage. The pilgrimage is indeed a very hazardous one. The Sabarimala temple is in the thick of the Reserve forests of Ranni in the Manimala Range and is inaccessible except by foot. It is said that in no other part of the world is there such a perilous pilgrimage of utterly unarmed multitudes to such a shrine situated among distant, unchartered, uninhabited high mountains abounding in wild animals like the tiger, the bear, the leopard, the elephant and the bison.[1] Still, more than two and a half lakhs of pilgrims from all parts of the country congregate at Sabarimala every year for worshipping Sasta. Some scholars have expounded the view that Sasta is only a Hinduised form of the Buddha and that the modern Sasta pilgrimage is only a relic of the Buddhist pilgrimages of ancient Kerala. Dr. Kunjan Pillai in the Travancore Census Report (1931) says:- " Sasta, the name often given to Buddha in Buddhist

---

1. J. I. H. Vol. 18. 1939. "A Forest pilgrimage in Travancore" by T. K. Joseph. P. 112.

scriptures was admitted into the Hindu Pantheon. The famous Sasta temples now existing at Sabarimala, Takali and other places in Travancore were originally none other than temples dedicated to Buddha ".[1] This view has been opposed recently by many scholars; the relationship between Sasta worship and Buddhism is now a subject of great controversy.

Sasta is described as 'Hariharasuta' or son of Vishnu and Siva in Hindu mythology.[2] The *Keralolpathi* says that after creating Kerala Parasurama built temples in the eastern forests for Sasta. Sasta was made the guardian of the eastern slopes and he was to be propitiated for the defence of the land frontier against the incursion of foreigners into the country.

The Sabarimala pilgrims have to take strict vows of 'ahimsa' and vegetarianism for a period of two months. They are allowed to arm themselves with nothing but absolute faith in God Sasta and with a short and frail woodden arrow or a club which is merely the

1. Travancore Census Report. 1931. P. 334.

2. In connection with the churning of Palazhi—the milk ocean—Vishnu assumed the guise of a beatiful woman by name Mohini. Siva became very enamoured of Mohini and as a result of the conjugal union between Siva and Mohini Sasta was born.

There is another story about the origin of Sasta. It is as follows:—Badrakali killed Mahishasura. His sister Mahishi performed tapas and obtained from Brahma the boon that she would conquer the Devas and that she could be killed only by a son of Hari and Hara who has spent twelve years as the 'dasa' of a man. Strengthened by this and other 'Varams' she began to oppress the Devas. They complained to Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. In response to their Prayers Sasta was born. This blessed child lived with Siva at Kailas. When he grew up Siva told him that he was born to kill Mahishi and to achieve that he should live as a 'dasa' of the Pantalam king for twelve years and sent him with his blessings to achieve his mission.

Prof. K. V. Rangaswamy Iyengar commemoration Volume. Article by Prof. V. Narayana Pillai on "Sasta the forest deity of Travancore.' PP. 539—40.

emblem of their temporary monasticism. The pilgrims have to be pure in thought, word and deed. They have to observe strict celebacy and abstemiousness for at least 55 days. During this period they must be constantly thinking of Sasta and calling out his name aloud. Sasta is called by different names like Harihara Sutan, Ayyan, Ayyappan etc. Pilgrims are expected "to live, move and have their being in him completely identifying themselves and everything else with him. During this period of preparation for pilgrimage the pilgrim will refer to himself and other devotees as 'Ayyappan" or 'Swamy' and not by name. He will be wearing rosary tulasi beads round his neck and also coloured dress (usually blue, saffron or yellow). "Just before they start on the pilgrimage they gird themselves with a narrow belt of black cloth which is held to be as sacred as a Brahmin's thread, and as they go along they will be seen carrying on their heads a long heavily hanging double kit-bag in the fore part of which is a husked cocoanut ceremoniously filled with ghee and with the divine immanence of Sasta."[1] This bag will contain provisions—strictly vegetarian—to last for about a fortnight. The bag will be worshipped by the pilgrims and is considered to be very sacred.[2]

One distinctive feature about this pilgrimage is that the pilgrims, do not observe any caste distinctions

---

1. J I H. Vol. 18 P 116

2. It is however strange that the front part of this sacred satchel bears the conspicuous figure of the crescent, a muslim emblem.

The Ayyappans' bag is supposed to consist of all the requirements he may need on his way to Sabarimala. The tying up the bag-"Kettumurukku" is an important ceremony. The 'Kettu' or bag usually consists of three pockets. The front one is loaded with raw rice, cocoanut with ghee, camphor etc., which are gifts to be offered to Sasta. The back pocket contains rice and other articles of food for the Ayyappan. The middle pocket contains vessels, spoons etc.,

during the period of their vow. It is indeed a happy sight to see high caste Kshetriyas and brahmins mingling freely and eating with pilgrims even from the lowest castes. All the pilgrims feel that they belong to the sastaic fraternity where there is no place for any invidious distinctions. The Sabarimala pilgrim will always have one prayer on his lips, and that is "Saranam Ayyappa." (Thou art my refuge oh! Ayyappan.) During the months of December and January one can see thousands of Sabarimala pilgrims with their vociferous sing-song repetition of "Saranam Ayyappa" streaming along all the lanes and roads of the country. The pilgrims are from both sexes, but in the case of women they must be either above fifty or below ten.

The traditional orthodox pilgrim route hallowed by the sanction of several centuries extends eastward for about 35 miles from Eruveli an inhabited village near the western edge of the Cimmerian woods. Eruveli is the rendezvous where all the pilgrims meet on a fixed date.[1] Novices have to buy a painted woodden arrow (which can be had at a very small cost) and those who go for the second time have to buy a woodden club,

---

1. J. I. H Vol. 18. P 116. There is a quaint custom called 'Pettathullal,' It is "reminiscent of Sasta's hunting expedition and return with spoils of the chase after killing Mahishasuri. The votaries blacken their faces and bodiess Plantains and other curry stuffs are tied in a blanket and slung on their shoulders. The first Kanni Ayyappan is armed with an arrow and the second with a club. With the loads on their shoulders they run towards Petta, Sasta'. temple where they worship the deity. They then worship Vavar to whom offerings in cash are made. The blackening of the face is emblematical of the original inhabitants of the forests who accompanied Sasta. The worship of Vavar indicates the early association of a Mahommedan saint with Sasta, the tolerance and discrimination exercised in the choice of associates and worship by all Hindu devotees without any caste distinction."

Man in India. Vol. 9, PP. 133-134. Article on "some aspects of the worship of Sasta" by Mr. L. A. Krishna Iyer.

both of which have to be religiously retained all through their journey. They will be deposited at the foot of an old tree near the Sasta temple. Before the pilgrims start from Erumeli sometimes they smear their bodies with charcoal paste, ashes, turmeric, etc dance together and worship at the Sasta shrine at Erumeli. Sabarimala temple is situated on a plot of ground about one square mile in area surrounded by a wide and deep moat. Besides Sasta there are some deities like Ganapathi, Subrahmaniya, etc., in the main temple. The Sasta immage is on a specially prepared ground about 25 cents in area and there are 18 sacred steps of stone leading to this. Very few pilgrims mount all the steps and come near the image for worship. Only veteran Ayappans cover the 18 steps. These 18 steps are considered very sacred by pilgrims and the prayer "*Pattinettamv patiye Saranam Ayyappa*" is very common among them. Outside the raised ground occupied by Sasta there are other deities called 'Vavar', 'Karuppan' 'Kadutta', etc. There is also a female deity and all of them are placed within the moat-encircled area.

The Sabarimala temple, it is said, originally belonged to the Raja of Pantalam (a place in Central Travancore). The Pantalam kings are scions of the ancient Pandyan royal family of Madura. Till a few decades ago the Pantalam Rajas were entitled to all the proceeds from the offerings to the temple. Even now they have a right to certain emoluments from the Sabarimala shrine. The valuable gold ornaments of Sasta are kept by the Panthalam Rajas in their place. On the day previous to the annual festival at Sabarimala these ornaments will be taken from the Pantalam palace through the forests in one non-stop race

accompanied by the entranced revealer (".Velichappadu") with his weapons and placed on the image.[1]

Now let us proceed to examine the relationship between Sasta worship and Buddhism. One important argument in support of the theory that Sasta is a Hinduised form of the Buddha is that Sasta is given as one of the synonyms of the Buddha in the Amarakosa. The Amarakosa gives the following synonyms for Buddha:— Sarvajna; Sugata; Buddha; Dharmaraja; Tathagata; Samanta bhadra; Bhagavan; Marajit; Lokajit; Jina; Sadabhijna; Dasabala; Advayavadi; Vinayaka; Munindra; Srighna; *Sasta*; Muni; Sakya; muni; Sakya simha; Sarvarthasiddha; Sauddhodani-Gautama; Arkabandhu; Mayadevisuta.

Sasta is the agent nown of 'Sas' which means 'to command'. Sasta means one who commands, or rules or teaches. The word Sasta can be applied in this sense to any deity whose functions are protecting, guarding, instructing, etc. A mere mention of the word 'Sasta' as one among the numerous synonyms of the Buddha cannot be taken as an evidence in support of the theory that Sasta and Buddha are the same. If so, it

---

1. There are various legends associating the Pantalam royal family with the origin of the Sabarimala shrine. One legend is as follows:—The Pantalam Raja was deeply intrested in religious meditations. The Raja had a dependent by name Aiyappan' who by his pious habits had earned his favour. The Queen became jealous of Aiyappan's influence over the Raja and hatched up a plot to do away with Aiyappan. She pretended serious illness and made the court physician to prescribe tiger's milk to save her life. Aiyappan was deputed to achieve the impossible *viz* bringing tiger's milk. But Aiyappan to the surprise of all returned from the forests riding on the back of a tiger with a pack accompanying him. Aiyppan was assigned an august place on the Sabari hills where the Raja promised to go and worship him annually.

The paintings of Aiynppn on the tiger's back are very common in Travancore.

must be contended that Vinayaka (*i.e.* Ganapathi) and Sasta are the same because Vinayaka is mentioned as one of the synonyms of Buddha!

Some scholars argue that the sing song repetition of "Saranam Ayyappa" by the pilgrims is reminiscent of the triple saranam formula of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha of the Buddhists. 'Saranam' means 'refuge' and it is contended that this invocation is peculiar to the Buddhists. But as the learned editor of the J. I. H. says Saranam Ayyappa is an expression which is common to all Hindus whenever the appeal is to a God exercising grace. "It is not so clearly established that the idea of seeking the protection of a saviour is an idea peculiar to the Buddhists or originated with the Buddha and the Buddhist teacher. No doubt the Buddhists have the notion of the 'Trisaranam' but that does not necessarily mean that that is the earliest or the first."[1]

The location of some of the famous Sasta temples in the interior of forests is considered as an argument in support of the Buddha theory because—it is contended—Buddhists generally prefer to live in secluded places. But it should be pointed out that there are innumerable Sasta shrines in places other than forests. Perhaps the chief Sasta shrines are in the forests, but one can come across hundreds of Sasta shrines in other parts of the country. Also it cannot be said that only Buddhists had a special liking for forests. Forests had been the place of 'tapas' or meditation for Hindu saints as well.

A very strong argument in favour of the Buddha theory is that Sasta worship has many Buddhistic features. The vow of 'ahimsa' which all pilgrims have

---

1. J. I. H. Vol. 18. P. 117.

to take, their fasting and abstinence from worldly pleasures and above all the absence of caste distinctions among the pilgrims are pointed out as distinctive Buddhistic features. Here again it must be pointed out that 'ahimsa' is not a pure Buddhistic doctrine. No doubt the Buddhists lay special emphasis on it; but it is not alien to the Jains and the Hindus. The Hindus often take vows of 'ahimsa' and fasting and they observe these things particularly when they go on pilgrimages. Pilgrims usually have a code of moral conduct different from others. They have to renounce many of the pleasures to which they are accustomed and to subject themselves to a good deal of discipline. Abstinence from worldly pleasures and renunciation of luxurious meals and attractive dresses during times of pilgrimages have been recommended by Hindu saints also and we cannot say that these were exclusively Buddhistic features. The object of these restrictions is to enable the pilgrim to concentrate more on his soul than on his body. After all the pilgrimage is for the solace and salvation of his soul. We do not rule out the possibility of the forms of Sasta worship having been influenced by Buddhism. In fact all the forms of worship, pilgrimages, festivals etc in Kerala bear stamps of strong Buddhistic influence. The Sasta pilgrimage also shows some clear Buddhistic influences. The stress on 'ahimsa' and the absence of caste distinction among the pilgrims etc may be cited as examples. But one cannot conclude from these alone that Sasta worship is only a Hinduised form of Buddha worship.

It must be pointed out here that Sasta has been considered to be a deity taking special interest in the arts of warfare. 'Yatrakkali' 'Chathirakkali' 'Sanghakkali' 'Panakkali' and other such plays prevalent in

ancient Malabar were specially devised to propitiate deities like Sasta and Durga.[1] 'Pana' was a sort of offering or 'Puja' to these deities made by the warriors who were about to proceed for war. Sasta was the presiding deity in most of the village 'Kalaries' or fencing schools. It is said that soldiers used to enter the battle field only after a formal puja to their war deities the chief of whom was Sasta. This practice was prevalent even in very ancient times and is traced back to the period of the 'Raksha Purushanmar', What is important in our discussion is the association of Sasta with warfare and gymnastics. This is a strong argument against the theory that Sasta and Buddha were one. It is difficult to accept that Sasta who took great delight in warfare and gymnastics and the Sakyamuni who preached and practised 'ahimsa' were one and the same.

Some scholars point out that there is a striking resemblance between the figures of Sasta and Buddha "in posture as well as in form."[2] But the modern image of Sasta does not strictly conform to the features of the Buddha. It is said that after the decline of Buddhism in Kerala the Buddha image at Sabarimala was replaced by or altered into the modern Sasta image. But there are numerous other images of Sasta in Travancore, and so far, we have not come across any Sasta image strictly conforming to the features of the Buddha. The author of this thesis has visited some of these Sasta shrines and can say with confidence that the images as they are found at present do not have any resemblance to the images of the Buddha. Since the alleged resemblance between the figures of Sasta

1. *Kerala Charitam* by Attoor Krishna Pisharodi. P. 53.
2. Selected Essays Raja Raja Varma P. 152.

and Buddha have given strength to the theory that both are the same, it is necessary to examine this question in detail and see whether there is any similarity between the two images from the point of view of iconography. The descriptions of the image of Sasta are found in the *Amsumabhedagama* the *Suprabhedagama* and the *Karanagama*. The *Amsumabhedagama*.[1] says that the figure of Sasta should have four arms and three eyes and a peaceful countenance, its colour should be golden yellow and it should be draped in silk garments. It must be seated upon a *Padmasana*. The *Suprabhedagama*[2] says that the figure of Sasta should have only two arms and two eyes and a dark complexion. It should be adorned with ornaments. The arms and legs should be kept folded, in the right hand there should be a crooked stick and in the left, fruits and tender leaves of plants. The body should be like that of a *Bhuta* with a big belly. He should be represented as playing with dogs, sheep and fowls. The *Karanagma* [3] says that the Sasta should have only two arms and two eyes and a dark complexion. He should be seated on a *Pitha* with his left leg hanging down the seat and the right one folded and rested upon the seat vertically. The hair of his head should be like blue black ink and be spread out. His vehicle is the elephant as also is the crest or his banner. " At the end of the description it is mentioned that the colour of Sasta might be blue, white or dark, his vehicle the bull, that he might have four arms and that the crest on his banner a cock "[4]

Thus we note that there are important differences in the descriptions of Sasta images found in the different authorities. Many of the images of Sasta found in Kerala

1. Hindu Iconography, Vol. ii. Part ii. P. 488.
2. Ibid. P. 489.
3. Ibid. PP. 489-490.
4. Ibid. P. 490.

satisfy the features described in these authorities. But it is quite clear that the descriptions of the Sasta images given in none of these authorities agree with those of the Buddha. The Buddha images must have the following features.1:- They may be sculptured either as standing or seated upon a *Simhasana* or other seats. The figure of the Buddha should be of white colour with a broad smiling face, the earlobes (which are to be pierced) hanging, having broad and long eyes, prominent nose, long arms, beautiful chest slightly fat limbs and a somewhat hanging belly. The image of Buddha should have only two eyes and a pair of arms. Its head should possess the *Ushnisha* which should be done up in the shape of a *Kirita*. In the case of a standing image the legs must be placed straight. Whether seated or standing the image must be clothed in yellow robes.

None of the Sasta images in Kerala can be said to be conforming to these features prescribed for the Buddha. A comparison of the features prescribed for the Buddha and Sasta will convince us that from the point of view of iconography they are quite different from each other.

Modern scholars are inclined to identify Sasta with Aiyanar a village deity commonly worshipped on the east coast.[2] Aiyanar is a non-Aryan deity. He was incorpo-

---

1. T A. S. Vol. ii, PP. 120-121.

2. Vide the articles on Sasta by Prof. V. Narayana Pillai in the ".Rangaswamy Iyengar commemaration volume PP 539—546 and Pr. I. H. C. III Session PP. 230—240. Also vide Mr. L. K. Balaratnam's book entitled "Sasta worship in Travancore" wnich contains the same views as Prof. Narayana Pillai's.

Mr. T. K. Joseph who wrote in the J. I. H. (Vol. 18) in 1939 expressing the view that Sasta is only a Hinduised form of the Buddha has himself changed his views. He too is now prepared to accept the view that Aiyappan and Aiyanar are t e same,

Vide article in Malayalam entitled 'Dharma Sastavu' in the '*Powra Prabha*' dated February 19, 1940,

rated into the Hindu Pantheon as a result of the fusion between the Aryan and non-Aryan cults in South India. Aiyanar is described as the chief male deity among the village Gods. He is known by the names of Sattan, Aiyan, Aiyappan, Hariharaputran and Sasta. One can come across innumerable images of Aiyanar in various forms and shapes in the various villages of the east coast. The Aiyappan images found on the west coast bear a very striking resemblance to these Aiyanar images. Aiyanar is sometimes seen with long curly hair a crown and ear rings of gold leaves. He is dark in colour and is some times represented as sitting on a throne below a banyan tree.[1] The Sabarimala image wears a crown and also jewels and ornaments like the Aiyanar.[2] The images of Aiyanar seen at different places in the East coast vary

---

1. S. I. Images of Gods and Goddesses. M. Krishna Sastri P. 230

2. The following is a g od description of Aiyanar:- "The chief male deity among the Grama-devatas is Aiyar or Aiyanar. He is also named Harihara putra (i.e.) Vishnu - Siva's son because he is said to owe his origin to the union of Siva and Vishnu when the latter took the female form called Mohini. Aiyanar is represented by a human form in a sitting posture with a red skin, a crown on his head and pearls in his locks. On his forehead he wears the sacred ashes, pearls on his ears and neck and a sort of ribbon on his breast. The arms, hands, feet and the whole body are full of jewels and ornaments. In his right hand he holds a sceptre to indicate that he is the chief among the village gods. Round his body and his left leg he wears a kind of belt called Bahupaddi which is also used by sages and others when they sit. From his shoulders garlands hang down. The upper part of his body is uncovered whilst the lower is covered with a motely garment. Aiyanar's two wives Puranai (on the right) and Putkalai (on the left) are represented as having natural bodies of a yellow colour with crowns on their heads and flowers in their hands Puranai wears on her forehead the mark of musk (Kasturi) and Putkalai the sacred ashes. The temples of Aiyanar stand usually at some distance west of villages in a grove. Close by the temple on both sides of it are figures of clay among which are Aiyanar's generals called Palaiyakkar. Aiyanar is never asked for any positive good. He only protects from harm and his worship consists solely in propitiation. Like Ganesa and Skanda, the popular deity Aiyanar is a lord and leader of demon host and his province is to guard the fields, crops and herds of the peassantry and to drive away their enemies Accord-

from one another in many details. So also the images of Sasta in Travancore. In the Sasta temple at Vattavila near Pangode, a suburb of Trivandram, the Sasta is represented as riding on a horse. A figure of Aiyanar (metal) from Rameswaram represents him also as riding on horse.[1] The Sasta image at Puthenchanthai at Trivandrum has a female figure on eihter side sculptured in stone. They are said to be Purnamba and Pushkalamba, the consorts of Sasta. Aiyanar also is said to have two wives by name Purani and Pudugalai.[2] The Sasta image at Thycaud at Trivandrum shows the Sasta in the *Sukhasana* posture with a tapering crown on his head.[3] This image shows likeness to the image of an Aiyanar from Tiruppalathurai in the Trichinopoly District.[4] These similarities between the images of Sasta and Aiyanar strengthen the theory that they are the same. It is very significant that the 'synonyms' given for Sasta and Aiyanar are the same *(eg.)* Aiyan, Aiyappan, Harihara putran, Sattan etc. Further it may be pointed out that both Sasta and Aiyanar are forest deities. Temples dedicated to Aiyanar and Sasta in the west coast are generally found in Kavus or forests. Even in regard to the function of these two deities

---

ingly outside every village in Southern India may be seen shrines of 'Aiyanar surrounded by rude clay or terracotta figures of horses and other animals of life size on which he is supposed to ride when keeping guard. His image is roughly curved sometimes in a sitting posture and at other times on horse back When properly represented he ought to have a crown on his head the Siva mark on his forehead, a sceptre in his hand and ornament on his person." S. I. I. Vol: II. P. 40.

1. South Indian Images by H. Krishna Sastri P. 233. Fig. 142.
2. Ibid. P. 230.
3. K. V. Rangaswamy Iyengar Commemoration Volume. P. 543.
4 "South Indian Images." P. 231 Fig. 140

there is great resemblance—Sasta like Aiyanar is a protecting deity of the villages"[1] He is considered by the Malayalees as the guardian of the land. The eight mountain tops along the Western Ghats are surmounted by eight temples in which are set up images of the Sasta to protect the country from all the misfortunes, and external evils. Sasta is essentially an indigenous deity. It is important to remember that Sasta worship is not familiar to the inhabitants of Northern-India. This deity which is very popular in Malabar does not appear to have been even known to the regions north of the Godavari. Sasta is not mentioned in any of the early sanskrit works.[2]

The story in the *Keralolpathi* that Parasurama instituted Sasta Gods in the Eastern frontiers of Kerala only refers to the fact of Sasta being incorporated into the Hindu pantheon. It must be pointed out here that Sasta worship in Kerala is not very popular among the brahmins. It is also significant that in some Sasta shrines, the priests are not brahmins, but only low caste Hindus.[3] These facts clearly prove that Sasta was a typical Dravidian deity.

We have examined above the various arguments in support of the view that the Buddha and Sasta are the same. On the whole we are inclined to come to the conclusion that Sasta was an indigenous Dravidian deity.

As we have stated already, we do not ignore the influence of Buddhism on the development of the Sasta cult in Kerala. But we cannot accept the view that Sasta is only a Hinduised form of the Buddha.

---

1. *Silappadikaram* V. R. Ramachandra Dikshidar. P. 51.
2. Hindu Iconography. T. A. Gopinatha Rao. Vol. ii. Part ii. P. 486.
3. In a Malayalam article in the *Pratidinam* dated, December 14 1939. Mr. T K. Joseph points out that in the Sasta shrine at Arakanattu in S. Travancore the priest is a *Kuravan* (a low caste Hindu like the *paraya*.)

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ILAVAS OF KERALA AND BUDDHISM.

THE Ilavas constitute the largest single Hindu community in Kerala. In religious practices and social customs they closely resemble the Nairs; but in the traditional heirarchy of caste the Nairs are considered to be 'Sudras' while the Ilavas are assigned to a much lower position. The Ilavas are a thriving sect in Kerala. During recent years their political and economic conditions have improved considerably. But even to-day they suffer from many social disabilities. To dine with an Ilava is strictly prohibited by caste rules and orthodox Brahmins even now will not allow the Ilavas to enter their houses. As an ethnic unit it is very difficult to distinguish the Ilavas from others. In features, complexion etc., they resemble the Nairs. But their position is little better than that of the untouchables in the social order. An examination of the early history of this community will throw a flood of light on the circumstances which led to their social degradation.

The popular view about the origin of the Ilavas is that they were Buddhist immigrants into Kerala from Ceylon. There are sufficient evidences to prove their Ceylonese origin. The name Ilava is derived from Ilam, the Tamil name for Ceylon. 'Simhala' was the ancient name for Ceylon and the caste name of the Ilavas must have passed through 'Simhalan' to 'Sihalan' and 'Ihalan' and finally to 'Ilavan'.[1] The Ilavas are also known as 'Tiyans' and 'Tiyan" considered to be a corruption of the Sanskrit 'Dvipan'

1. M. M. D. P. 145.

passing through 'Tivan'. 'Dvipam' in Sanskrit means 'island' and 'Tiyan' which is a corruption of 'Dvipan' means 'islander.' In the records of the Tellicherry factory the Ilavas are generally referred to as 'Tivee.' A very conclusive evidence in support of their island origin is the reference in the S. C. P. No. 2 of Sthanu Ravigupta (assigned to the 9th century A. D.) to the leader of the Ilavas as the 'Island ruler.'[2] Further we find a very clear statement in the famous folk songs in Malayalam, popularly known as *Vattakkan Pattukal*, to the effect that the ancestors of the Ilavas came from Ceylon. The most impartant of the *Vatakkan Pattukal* is the one called after an Ilava hero 'Valia Aromar Chevakar,' one of the most romantic and heroic figures of Kerala—who flourished in the 13th century. The following lines taken from this song are very significant.[2] :-

---

1. "Nor have the *Island ruler* and the wall officer or whoever it be any power to stop them on any charges whatsoever."
Para q of S. C. P. No. 2.

"*Nammute pandathe karanonmar*
Iluvathu nattinnu vannoranu
Cheran Perumalu tampuranum
Ola eluthi ayachathallo
Iluvathu Rajavinu kathu kitty
Appol parayunnu Rajavallo
Ivitunneluvare ayakka venam.
Malayala Perumalute kalpanayal
Pacha kutayume pacha ponti
Kulaviruthennoru chevakarum
Malayalathekkangu yatrayai."

These lines say that the great ancestors of the Ilavas came from 'Iluvathunadu' (Ceylon). King Cheraman Perumal of Kerala wrote to the king of Ceylon to send some Ilavas from his country and in accordance with the Perumal's letter the king of Ceylon sent them to Kerala.

The theory that Ilavas were immigrants from Ceylon has now gained acceptance at the hands of most scholars.[1] The causes for their migration into Kerala are not very clear. Dr. N. Kunjan Pillai in the Travancore Census Report says that "the ancient Tamil works as well as numerous inscriptions show that the Chola and Pandya kings who frequently invaded and conquered Ceylon had greatly encouraged the immigration of Ilavas to South India."[1] We do not know what are "the Tamil works and the numerous inscriptions," which the Doctor refers to. As far as our knowledge goes there is no specific reference in any Tamil work or inscription to the fact

---

1. Vide Cyclopaedia of India (1885) Vol. 3. P. 838. Land system of Br. India (Baden Powell) Vol III. P. 157. Land of the Perumals. (Day) PP. 319—320.

2. Travancore Census Report (1931) P. 382.

that the Ilava immigration from Ceylon was encouragde by the Chola and Pandya kings. It must also be pointed out that the Ilavas are found only in Kerala--Cheradesa--and not in the Chola or Pandya countries. Dr. Caldwell says that "it is tolerably certain that the Ilavas and Tiyans who cultivate the cocoanut palm of Travancore are the descendants of Shannar coolies from Ceylon." It is guggested that the Ilavas were brought to Kerala as labourers in the cocoanut estates. Cocoanut is called 'Tenkay' which means the southern fruit' and is believed to have been introduced into Kerala from Ceylon. It is also believed that the Ilavas who came from Ceylon were responsible for introducing it into Kerala. The vast majority of the tappers in Kerala today are Ilavas. Also the Ilavas show a special aptitude in the coir industry and other such trades connected with the cocoanut. In fact the majority of the coir workers in Kerala today are Ilavas. These facts suggest a close connection between the Ilavas and cocoanut cultivation in Kerala. Whether cocoanut was known to Kerala before the immigration of the Ilavas or not is a subject of controversy. But it is certain that this was the main occupation of the Ilavas for centuries together. It is natural that the Ilavas who were familiar with the cocoanut cultivation in Ceylon must have taken to this profession in Kerala also. The *Vatakkan Pattukal* throw some light on the profession of the Ilavas in ancient Kerala. They say that the Ilavas came as "Chevakars' or fighters. In ancient Kerala duels were the usual means of setting disputes; there were many organised fencing schools called "Kalaries" for giving training to the people in duels and battles. There was also the system of 'Kutippaka' or 'family feud.' In these duels people were allowed to have

deputies and from the Vatakkan Pattukal we learn that the Ilavas were often deputed to fight in these deadly combats. The practice of deputing Ilavas to fight in the duels was so very common that this was considered to be their chief profession. The lines given below are from the 'Vatakkan Pattukal;' they are illustrative of this point. A Naduvali (or ruler of a district) gives the following advice to two Nair chieftains who were fighting against each other over a dispute about their seniority :-[1]

"*Padavettu tammil tudangiyalo*
Eriya janangal nasichu pokum
Nallangha chekavare tedikkolin
Angam pitichu jayikkunnorku
Annatte muppadum vanirikkam."

The advice is :— "If you wage war, many people will die. So you search for combatant Chekavars (Ilavas) to fight for you. He who wins in the fight will rule as the elder." This shows that the 'Chekors' or 'Chovas' (Ilavas) were a class of professional fighters whose main business was to fight these mortal combats for remuneration.

In another song we find a clear statement to the effect that the Ilavas were mainly 'Angam' fighters. Valia Aromar Chevakar in a moving address to his brother on taking leave of his relatives before proceeding to his last fight says :—[1]

"*Padavettu tammill tudangiyalo*
Eriya janangal nasichu pokum
Nallangha chekavare tedikkolin
Angam pitichu jayikkunnorku
Annatte muppadum vanirikkam."

— Malayalam.

"*Nammude pandate karanonmar*
Anga chamayam chammannu ponnu
Chekavanmarayi janichal pinne
Valkanayil chorello chekonmarku
Angathinu aranum vannatenkil
Pokate kandittu irunnukuda."

The address may be translated as follows:— "Our great ancestors were all angam fighters. When one is born as a Chekavan he has to earn his bread on the point of the sword. If any one requisitions your services for Angam fight you should not refuse to go." These statements in the folk songs are clear evidences in support of the view that the Ilavas were professional fighters. Whether they were practising this profession from the time of their immigration or not cannot be determined. It may be said without fear of contradiction that the two important professions practiced by the Ilavas from very ancient times were cocoanut cultivation and Angam fighting. The practice of duels and fights became extinct by the close of the medieval period; the Ilavas continue even today as workers in the cocoanut estates.

It is not possible to settle with accuracy the period of Ilava immigration into Kerala. It is quite certain that they had settled in the country at the time when the deeds of privileges were granted to the Jews and the Christians because they are mentioned in one of these deeds. There are three ancient deeds, one conferred on the Jewish community and two on the Syrian Christian colonists, assignable to the period A. D 700—825.[1] The Jewish deed (No. 1) of Bhaskara Ravi

1. There has been much diversity of opinion regarding the dates of these deeds. Mr. Kanaka Sabai Pillai assigns them to the last decade of the 2nd century A. D. Dr. Burnell says that the only possible date for the second deed is 774 A. D. Dr. Kielhorn suggests A. D. 680 as an alterna ive date. Sir Walter Elliot fixes 861 A. D. Some authors assign these deeds to the period 10—12th century A. D. The consensus of scholarly opinion is in favour of the period A. D. 700—825.

Baskara Ravivarman is assigned to the end of the seventh or beginning of the eighth century A.D. Dr. Burnell says that "the only possible date" for the second deed *i. e.* the settlement deed of the main colony of Christians, is A. D. 774. This was issued by Veera Raghava Chacravarti. The third deed of Sthanu Ravigupta issued to the southern Christian colony is placed about 50 years later than the second deed *i. e.* about A. D. 824.

The J. C. P. of Bhaskara Ravivarman (C. A. D. 700) makes no mention of the Ilavas. The S. C. P. No. 1 of Veera Raghava Chacravarti (A. D. 774) issued to Iravi Corttan of Mahodevar Pattanam, the lord of Manigramam, makes reference to the four classes of foreign settlers in the country, one of which is interpreted to be the Ilava caste. The king confers on Iravi Corttan- "the grand merchant of the Cheraman world"— among other privileges "the sovereign merchantship over the four classes."[1] Mr. Logan says that "Jews and Christians were certainly two of the classes; another of them may have been the Islanders or Cingalese (Dvipar, Divar; Tiyar, and Simhalar, Sihalar, Ilavar) the fourth were Chettis (East coast merchants) or Arabs or perhaps Chinese."[2] Of course there is not sufficient ground to warrant such an inference and we

---

1. The S. C. P. of Veera Raghava Chacravarti says.- .... We also have given to him (the right of) the feast cloth, house pillars (pictured rooms?) all the revenue, the curved sword (or dagger) and in (or with) the sword the sovereign merchantship, the right of proclamation, the privilege of having fore runners, the five musical instruments, the conch, the light by day the spreading cloth, litter, royal umbrella, vaduca drum, the gateway with seats and ornamental arches and the sovereign merchantship over the four classes, also the oil makers and the five kinds of artificers we have subjected to him or given as slaves to him..............."

Vide Appendix XII of M. M. D. for the J. C. P. No. 1. S. C. P. No. 1 and S. C. P. No. II.

2. M. M. D. P. 271.

cannot say with certainty that Ilavas were included in the "four classes" mentioned in the document. This is only a conjecture of Mr. Logan. But in the S. C. P.No. II of Sthanu Ravigupta which is assigned to 824 A. D. there are many direct references to the Ilavas. In paragraph (b) of the document we find a reference "to the share staff (வாரக் கோல்) of the four families of Ilawar and of the eight families of Ilakeyar belonging to them, and one family of washermen coming from the same stock as these." Among their privileges mentioned are "fetter--right" (தளை) or right of having foot-rope for mounting Cocoanut trees and 'ladder right' or right of reaping pepper (?)[1] In paragraph (c) of the document "the four families of Ilawar (with their servants and washerman)" and the various other castes are commanded "to do their duty to the God, the planter by planting (rice etc) the setter by setting (trees or by building, offering?) so that the required ceremonies such as the oil for the church suffer no diminution."[2] Again we find a

1. "...............And I also who formerly had the possession of the share staff of the four families of Ilawar and of the eight families of Ilakeyar belonging to them and one family of washermen coming from the same stock as these —all these being entitled to the fetter right and ladder-right, to the tax for the elephant-feeder and to the wash gold which the Chandan is wont to get as well as to harvest gold, to the nightly meal of rice and to the pot-measure—I possessed of this share-staff and of the Cavvan and of those five kandies have given them by a free and unrestricted transfer...." S. C. P No. 2

2. "...............Maruwan Sapir Igo who has received the water of this town having arranged that these four families of Ilawar (with their servants and washerman) two families of — one family of carpenters, and four families of Vellaler — the later being Caralar of the Alave land — that all these may do their duty to the God, the planter by planting (rice etc.) the setter by setting, so that the required ceremonies such as the oil for the Church, suffer no diminution has enacted and given to the Tarisa Church the land now to be described." S. C. P. No. 2.

reference to the Ilavas in paragraph (p) of the document.[1] In paragraph (q) of the deed we find a reference to the "Island ruler" or the Tiyar head-man.[2]

The Jewish and Syrian copper plates to which we have referred above are the earliest reliable inscriptions discovered in Kerala. The reference to the Ilavas in these documents clearly proves that they had settled down in the country at that time.

Mr. Logan thinks that the Tiyans must have arrived in Kerala before the time of *Kosmas Indiko Pleustes* (A. D. 522—547). In Photios abridgement of the *Indika of Ktesias* reference is made to "palm trees and their dates" which were said to be thrice the size of those in Babylon. In another abridged passage of the same work by another writer the palm fruits are referred to as the "largest of nuts." Mr. Logan thinks that "there is no doubt that *Kosmas Indiko Pleustes* described most accurately the cocoanut palm under the appellation of 'Argellia' an erroneous transliteration probably of the word 'narikelam' or 'nalikeram' usually applied to the fruit by the Malayali Brahmins.[3]" If cocoanut could be mentioned in this work certainly it must have been imported into the country before the 6th century and the Ilavas who are said to have brought the 'southern fruit' must have immigrated into the country before this period. Mr. Logan is inclined to think that the

1. "..................Those Ilawar are permitted to follow out their occupations in the bazaar and on the wall. The washerman may come and do his work in the bazaar and on the wall." S. C. P. No. 2.

2. "Nor have the Island ruler and the wall officer or whoever it be any power to stop them on any charges whatsoever. Though they should commit a trespass the Palliyar alone have to try them." S. C. P. No. 2.

3. M. M. D. P. 145.

Ilava immigration must have taken place sometime after the 1st century A. D. His argument is drawn from the fact that the Periplus which gives a detailed list of the imports and exports of Kerala does not refer to cocoanut or cocoanut produce of any description. Pepper, beatel, ivory, etc are prominently mentioned, but there is absolutely no reference to cocoanut. Mr. Logan thinks that if the cocoanut tree had existed at this time in Malabar the produce of such a notable fruit tree would have been exported and must have been mentioned by the author of the Periplus. It must be pointed out here that the absence of any reference to cocoanut should not by itself be taken as an evidence in support of the view that cocoanut was unknown to Kerala. The list given by the Periplus is by no means a complete one. The maximum inference one can draw from the omission of cocoaunt from this list is that it was not one of the articles of export. Probably there was no demand for cocoanut in foreign countries as there was for ivory or pepper. Cocoanut must have been cultivated in the country, but would not have been exported to foreign countries. Mr. Logan's theory that the Ilava immigration must have taken place after the 1st century A. D. may be true, but the argument he gives is not very convincing.

It is very likely that the Ilava immigration must have taken place when Buddhism was very popular in Kerala. Buddhism had become the predominent religion of Ceylon during the early centuries of the Christian era and the Ilavas who came from Ceylon must certainly have been followers of that faith. A mass migration of Buddhists from Ceylon to Kerala would not have been possible if Kerala

had been hostile to Buddhism. During the early centuries of the Christian era Buddhism had become a dominant influence in Kerala and thus the immigrants from Ceylon would have found the atmosphere in Kerala very congenial. The *Vatakkan Pattukal* say that Ilavas were sent to Kerala by the king of Ceylon in accordance with a request from the Perumal, king of Kerala. We know that there was great cultural intercourse between Ceylon and Kerala during the early centuries of the Christian era, particularly during the regimes of Chenguttavan and Gajabahu. It is quite likely that the Ilava immigration took place during this period.

Even though we accept the view that the Ilavas were immigrants from Ceylon it is difficult to believe that the present Ilava community is constituted solely by the descendants of these immigrants. We have already stated that the Ilavas constitute the largest single Hindu community in Kerala. If we say that all the Ilavas are the descendants of the immigrants from Ceylon we have to accept the view that the number of the immigrants into Kerala was greater than the number of Nairs and other high castes already occupying the country. We know that the Ilavas were suffering from many social disabilities for centuries together and that this had led to mass-scale conversions from their ranks to Christianity and Islam. In spite of these conversions we find the Ilavas in such large numbers today. It is difficult to believe that there was such a large-scale immigration from a very small island like Ceylon. Ceylon is too small a place to afford such a big depletion of its population. Further, if there had been such a large scale immigration from Ceylon it would have been recorded in the traditional accounts of the

country. What we gather from all these facts is that only a small band of Ilavas must have come to Kerala from Ceylon. But how did they multiply into a very big community. It is usually a community with sound economic means that has a prolific growth. But the Ilavas did not have any of the advantages of economic prosperity. The only reasonable explanation for their numerical strength is that at one time in their history they must have received into their folds large numbers of people from other communities. People from other communities would not join the Ilava community under the present circumstances as the community suffers from many serious social disabilities. Also changes from one community to another take place usually with a change of religion. It is quite possible that the bulk of the present Ilava community is constituted by the original converts to Buddhism in Kerala. The Ilavas who came from Ceylon must have been the largest single group of Buddhists in Kerala. During the early centuries of the Christian era there were regular conversions to Buddhism from the ranks of the high castes and thus the number of Buddhists in the country swelled up. When Buddhism declined in Kerala those who followed that faith-contemptuously called as 'Bauddhas'-became the victims of social degradation. The vast number of Buddhists along with the Ilavas now constituted a new class of "Bauddhas" whose position was little better than that of the untouchables. When Buddhism completely disappeared from Kerala these 'Bauddhas' were received back into the Hindu fold, but they had to be contented with the lower rungs of the social ladder. The bulk of the converts to Buddhism was from the Nair caste, but after the final disappearance of Buddhism they

were grouped along with the Ilavas and thus the number of the Ilava community swelled up. This accounts for the close resemblance between the Nair and the Ilava communities in social customs, religious practices, etc. We have already referred to the fact that in features and complexion the people of the two communities resemble each other very closely. This also affords an explanation for the comparative smallness of the number of Nairs in Kerala. The Nairs had been a very thriving community from pre-historic times. They were the principal landlords and administrators of the country. But the conversions from their ranks to Buddhism were so numerous that the growth in their numbers has not been very appreciable; it compares very poorly with the other communities in Kerala.

If the Ilavas of Kerala are to be considered solely as the descendants of the immigrants from Ceylon, we have to give a convincing solution for the paradox of their large numbers in the country to-day.

The Ilavas to-day are proud of their Buddhistic heritage. Even though they have completely merged themselves into the Hindu fold they have not lost their identity completely. Further researches into the history of this community may through much light on the early history of Buddhism in Kerala and also on the cultural relations between ancient Kerala and Ceylon.

CHAPTER IX

BUDDHISM IN KERALA AND BRAHMANISM.

ONE remarkable feature of life in ancient Kerala was the general spirit of toleration which prevailed in the country. The princes of ancient Cheranadu considered toleration as their 'Dharma' and their subjects were only too willing to follow their example. The peculiarity of this age was that there was no clear distinction between the orthodox religion—Brahmanism- and the so-called dissenting sects. "The fundamental principles of all these sects were the same and the differences if any were minor and trivial. It was in philosophical outlook and speculation that there was any difference and hence the masses of the people to whom the higher philosophy was a sealed book did not trouble themselves about it."[1] Lively discussions on the different religious systems by their respective votaries were a common feature of this age. 'Vadas' or religious disputations used to be encouraged by the princes and this had attracted notable scholars of various religious sects to the Chera capital (as is clear from the description of Vanji given in the *Manimekalai*). But religious discussions were usually confined to the cultured few and differences in opinions and views among them were treated with mutual respect. It was only during the period of the Nayanars and Alwars that religious toleration was substituted by fanaticism.

Conversions from one religion to another could take place with remarkable ease during this period.

---

1. Introduction to Silappadikaram V. R. R. Dikshitar, pp. 47-48.

Hence they were a common occurence. But conversions never created any difficulties in social or family life. Members of the same family could be members of different religions. There are ample instances of the parents following one religion and their sons or daughters following a different one. Freedom to choose ones own religion was never recognised in such a large measure in any other period in the country's history. Any number of instances may be given to prove that religion was by individual choice during this period. While Chenguttavan was of the orthodox faith, his brother Ilango was an ascetic. Their common friend Sattanar was an ardent Buddhist. Kovalan, the hero of the *Silappadikaram*, appears to be a follower of the Vedic faith, but his father Masattuvan[1] becomes a Buddhist and his wife's father (Kannaki's father) Manaikan[2] joins the Ajivaka sect of the Jains. Madhavi[3] the courtesan and her daughter Manimekalai become Buddhist nuns. Sometimes we find people worshipping different deities at the same time. For instance, Kovalan and Kannaki "circumambulate the temple sacred to Manivannan" (Vishnu) and also worship at "the highly shining silatala jointly built by the Jaina house holders."[4] It would be wrong to say that this general spirit of toleration which prevailed in the country was the result of indifference to religion. Far from it. From the various accounts given by the classics of this period we gather that people were deeply interested in religion. But they were truly religious; they never carried religious enthusiasm to absurd lengths of bigotry. It must be pointed out that this was

---

1. *Silappadikaram.* Canto. 27 ll, 90—97.
2. Ibid, Canto, 27—ll, 98—101.
3. Ibid, Canto, 27—ll, 103-103.
4. Ibid, Canto, X, ll, 5—26.

particularly possible because the differences between one sect and another were not clearly emphasised. There are certain doctrines common to the followers of all faiths. For instance, " to every one of them Karma was a factor to be reckoned with. Man's actions bad or good are bound to yield results bad or good. Suffering in this world may not necessarily be due to unrighteous acts done now, but may be the result of past actions. Hence man must do his duty if he wants to attain salvation."[1] Since the emphasis in those days was on the points of agreement among diffent faiths and not on their differences, there could be religious harmony and toleration among the people.

Before we proceed to discuss about the different religious systems which prevailed in ancient Kerala we shall try to examine why Buddhism became popular and also what type of Buddhism was prevalent in the country. One of the causes for the popularity of Buddhism in Kerala was the novelty in its teachings and forms of worship. Buddhist forms of worship with all the paraphernalia of elaborate festivals, grand processions, etc. had a special appeal to the people. Further the humanitarian work which the Buddhist monks readily undertook among the people-like providing amenities for the poor, giving medical aid to men and animals, digging wells, planting trees, etc., won a very large number of followers. Another important cause for the rapid spread of Buddhism in the country was that it afforded social equality to all its adherents without any distinctions of caste. Here was a new opportunity to the masses to escape from the hated and humiliating position of being " low castes. " After all, the

---

1, Introduction to Silappadikaram V. R. R. Dikshitar pp. 52-53.

new religion resembled the old in all outward appearances. A conversion to Buddhism could remove many of their social disabilities and so many 'low castes' eagerly joined the new sect. The vedic religion with its narrow and rigid sectarianism could not compete with this new popular religion. Further, "the exclusiveness of the orthodox Namboodiries and their sustained endeavour to keep the fundamental truth of the brahmanical faith under a cover of mystry tended to alienate the common people and persuade them to accept the lead of the Buddhists and the Jains.."[1]

It is very difficult to determine correctly what type of Buddhism was prevalent in the country because of the paucity of literary evidences. It would be quite reasonable to conclude that the Buddhism in Kerala was not different from that which prevailed in the neighbouring Tamil kingdoms. Again we have to draw our conclusions mainly from the *Manimekalai.*

Book XXX of the *Manimekalai* takes the form of the teaching of the essentials of Buddhism as it was understood by the author. Sattan does not indicate the authority upon which he relies for the summary of Buddhism which he gives. It seems Sattan is expounding the fundamental teachings of the Buddha and not the teachings of the different schools of Buddhism. It would be reasonable to conclude that the Buddhism expounded in the Tamil classic is not merely a form of religion believed in by the author, but actually that form of Buddhism which prevailed in 'Tamilakam' as a whole. Some general conclusions may be formed from an examination of the exposition of Buddhistic principles in Chapter XXX.

1. Travancore state Manual 1940. Vol. II. P. 36.

Aravana Adikal (the Buddhist saint) begins his teachings with how the Buddha came into this world and how he attained enlightenment. Then follows the exposition of the "Four truths" and the "Twelve Nidanas." This exposition seems to follow closely that of the *Sarvastivadins* and the *Sautrantikas*.[1] In the exposition of the theological method and the five Skandas (which we find at the end of Chapter XXX) also we find the author conforming to the main principles of the *Sarvastivadins*.

There are four occasions in the *Manimekalai* when the author deviates from the main story to give an exposition of the tenets of Buddhism. (1) Through the 'statue in the pillar' in Chapter XXI. (2) Through Aravana Adikal in Chapter XXIV. (3) Through Kannaki the chaste Goddess in Chapter XXVI. (4) Again, through Aravana Adikal in Chapters XXIX and XXX. On all these occasions it is almost the same teaching that is given. "That the teaching followed was that of the *Sautrantika* is in clear evidence where Kannaki is made to tell *Manimekalai* "having learnt in this old city the wise teaching of those that profess the various religions and after feeling convinced that they do not expound the path of truth you will then accept the path of the pitakas of the Great one and follow it without transgression."[2]

It is now a generally accepted view that the Buddhism which the *Manimekalai* expounds is not Mahayanism but Hinayanism.[3] It is very significant that the author of the *Manimekalai* does not refer to

1. Manimekalai in its historical setting P 83.

2. Ibid. P. 85,

3. 'Buddhism in Manimekalai' *Vide* Buddhistic studies,' Law P. 11.

Mahayanism anywhere in his book. Even when the author deals with the heretical systems he does not make mention of Mahayanism or any other school of Buddhism. Dr. Iyengar points out that the idea of 'Nirvana' expounded in the *Manimekalai* is distinctly Hinayana. The work throughout expounds Nirvana as a release from the ills of life, products of Karma, in accordance with the original teachings of the Buddha. "The highest idea of Mahayana Buddhism is not to escape from the ills of life, but universal love. Nirvana in the sense of extinction is never regarded as man's final aim. Even attempts for the salvation of ones own self irrespective of that of others are deprecated.[1] As we have already pointed out Buddhism of the *Manimekalai* was not merely that of Sattan but quite probably that followed by the people throughout the Tamil kingdoms. So our conclusions from the study of Buddhism as expounded in the *Manimekalai* apply to all the three Tamil kingdoms of the South.

Even though Mahayanism was not popular in the Chera country in the *Manimekalai* epoch, there is ample evidence to prove its prevalence in the country in the later centuries. The Buddha images discovered in the different parts of the country are sufficient testimony to the influence of Mahayanism in Kerala.

Buddhism and Brahminsm.

When we traced the spread of Buddhism in Kerala we specially emphasised the fact that Brahmanism was prevalent in the country when Buddhism was introduced there and that Buddhism could not displace

1. Ibid.

Brahmanism even during the heyday of its popularity. This view, however, is not approved by some scholars. Mr. Logan propounded a theory that the Vedic religion was unknown to Kerala before the 8th century A. D. and even though Mr. Logan's arguments had been refuted long ago, his views are still maintained by many scholars. It is contended by them that till the end of the 7th or beginning of the 8th century A.D. people in Kerala were followers of the Avaidika systems and that there were no brahmins in the country. But we can give ample incontrovertible evidences to prove that the Brahmin religion had been prevalent in the country long before Buddhism was introduced there.

The popular tradition about the origin of Kerala is that Parasurama the Brahmin sage raised it from the sea by hurling his mace from Gokarnam to Cape Comorin; Kerala is called Bhargava Kshetram after Bhargava or Parasurama. This Parasurama legend should not be dismissed as unhistorical. A keen student of history can find in this legend the story of the Brahmin colonisation of Kerala. The story that Kerala was created by Parasurama need not be taken literally. It should be accepted only as the allegorical description of Parasurama's discovery of Kerala. The Aryans of the North in the vedic period were completely ignorant of the existence of a country by name Kerala. In fact they knew very little about the people and civilisation of the regions south of the Vindhyas. The first time the Aryans came to know of Kerala must have been when Parasurama led a colony of Brahmins into the country. It would of course be puerile to argue that the Kerala country never existed before the time of Parasurama simply because the Aryans knew nothing about it. This

would be as ridiculous as saying that there was no America before Colombus discovered it! The Puranic story that Parasurama created Kerala should only be taken to mean that Parasurama discovered Kerala for the Aryans. Parasurama is said to have made a gift of the land to the Brahmins. This can only mean that the Brahmins were able to acquire many rights and privileges in the country.

The colonisation of Kerala by the Brahmins must have taken place during the age immediately succeeding the Rig veda. Parasurama seems to be a post-vedic hero. The Rig Veda makes mention of Brigu, Jamadagni and other ancestors of Parasurama, but is completely silent over him. He is one of the most important of the Puranic heroes and he has many brilliant exploits to his credit. If he had lived in the Vedic period his name would not have been omitted in the hymns. It seems reasonable to assign him to the period immediately following the Rig Vedic age.

There are different versions about Parasurama leading the Brahmins into Kerala. According to one version Parasurama obtained the permission of the ruler of Kerala to establish a few Brahmin families in the country. He is said to have presented to the Kerala ruler the famous crown called 'Sritilakam' or 'Tiruttangamudi.' It is said that the Chera rulers of Kerala used to wear this crown for many centuries and that it was taken away by the famous Rajendra Cholan when he invaded the country.[1] Visscher the Dutch chaplain at Cochin in the 18th century gives another story about

---

1. *Keralacharitam,* P. 35,

the advent of the brahmins into Kerala.[1] This legend makes the Namboodiri brahmins of Malabar descendants of fishermen. There is a Maratha tradition also which says that Parasurama turned fishermen into Brahmins in order to people Kerala. Sir William Hunter is inclined to accept this view and in support of this he refers to "their polygamy, their post-nuptial marriage the prohibition of holy matrimony among all but the eldest son, and to the ceremonial fishing as part of the marriage ritual among the Yajurvedic branch of the caste" as the relic and record of a pre-Brahmanic age. But this view has generally been condemned as thoroughly unhistorical. There are really no substantial evidences

---

"In by-gone ages the sea washed the foot of a mountain range which now lies 7 or 8 miles inland. The men who dwelt in the neighbourhood gained their subsistence by fishing along the mountain shores. Now it happened that there dwelt at Gocarna near Goa a certain prophet universally renowned for sanctity whose name was Paroese Raman. Discovering to his sorrow that his aged mother had acquired an evil notoriety in the neighbourhood for her misdeeds he felt unable to endure the public shame she had brought upon him. At length inspired by a divine impulse he seized a rice winnow and hurled it with tremendous force from Gokarna, right over the sea· by a wonderful miracle it was carried onward as far as Cape Comorin upon which all the sea between the two places immediately dried up and was transformed into that tract of level land to which we now give the name Malabar. The prophet resolved to take up his abode with his mother in this strange land, hoping here to find a hiding place for her disgrace. Meanwhile the fishermen of the mountains hearing of the miracle, flocked into these lowlands and made for the sea-shore: The prophet met them and knowing that a land without inhabitants is waste and desolate persuaded them to remain and settle there; and in order the more to attract them, he invested them with the dignity of Bramins promising at the same time to support them according to his custom by which he was pledged to provide food daily for 3000 of that caste. He then took the fishing nets with which they were laden and tore them into strands which he twisted together to make the three cords which the Brahmins wear as a sign of their dignity tied in a knot on the shoulder and falling down below the waist These Brahmins of Malabar are called Namboodiries and are reproached by the other Brahmins for their descent from fishermen." Visscher's Letter No. 1.

to prove the descent of the Namboodiries from fishermen. On the other hand anthropometrical and other evidences go to prove that the Namboodiries are the truest Aryans in South India. It would be reasonable to conclude that the Namboodiries were immigrants into Kerala from the north. Whether the Namboodiri Brahmins were brought into Kerala by Parasurama or not, is not a subject to be determined by the historian. He is not concerned whether any hero by name Parasurama actually lived in flesh and blood or not. To him the Parasurama story is important as it conveys the historical truth of the Brahmin colonisation of Kerala.

The *Keralolpathi* and other ancient works give us an idea as to the importance of the role the Brahmins were playing in the early phases of the country's history. The 'Taliatiries' or the protectors who were entrusted with the Government of the country before the advent of the Perumals were chiefly Brahmins and even today in some ancient Namboodiri families there are traditions which prove the truth of their having exercised secular authority once. Till very recently some Namboodiri families had to observe the practice of keeping armed attendants to accompany the Namboodiries in their travels. There is still the practice of people addressing the members of certain Namboodiri families with the usual respectful appellations due to rulers, eg. "Tirumeni" "Tamburan" etc. These practices have practically disappeared now; however they can be interpreted as relics of sovereign authority which the Namboodiries once exercised in the country. It is significant that the Tamil Brahmins who have settled down in Kerala in recent centuries do not enjoy any of these privileges.

The *Keralolpathi* also tells us that the Brahmins took an active part in establishing the Perumal regime. The great national assembly at 'Tirunavaye' was convened under the inspiration of the Brahmins and, as we have already stated, it was this assembly which decided to install the Perumals in power. Again the Brahmins are described to be playing a very prominent part in the religious discussions and debates which were very common in the Perumals' courts. We find the Brahmins trying to persuade Bana Perumal to give up his "Bauddhamargam' and to give strict punishments to the Bauddhas. The punishment which the Brahmins recommended for heretics (Bauddhas) were cutting off the tongues and expulsion from the country.[1]

The Brahmins in ancient Kerala are described to have taken a prominent part even in the development of the arts of warfare. The traditions say that some Brahmin families obtained "Sastra Vidya" from Parasurama himself. The *Keralolpathi* tells us that the brahmins set up eighteen 'Kalaries' or centres of military training in different parts of the country. Even now there is a group of Namboodiries called "Chathira Namboodiries" (Sastra Namboodiries) who are considered to have lost the purity of their caste because of their military traditions.

From these various accounts we gather that the Brahmins were playing a very prominent role in not only religious matters but in political and social life as well. The Brahmins were no doubt very small in number but they were able to exercise this great influence over the people because of the popularity of their religion.

---

1. *The Keralolpathi* PP, 30 - 31.

From what we know of Kerala traditions, this dominating influence of the Brahmins can be traced back to pre-historic times—definitely to a period before the rule of the protectors.

Now we shall briefly examine the various arguments brought forward by Mr. Logan and others in support of the theory that there was no Vedic religion in Kerala before the 8th century A. D. [1] It is contended that when Yuan Chwang the Chinese pilgrim visited the southern regions (629....645 A. D.) either he found no Vedic Brahmins at all or they were in such numbers and influence as not to deserve mention.[2] It is surprising how such a conclusion can be arrived at when the Chinese pilgrim refers to "the hundreds of Deva temples and the professed adherents of the various-sects." Wherever the pilgrim travelled he found both religions, Brahminism and Buddhism, existing side by side. Commenting on it Sir William Hunter observes, "On the Madras coast Buddhism flourished, and indeed throughout Southern India the faith still seems to have been in the ascendant, although struggling against Brahmin heretics and their gods."

It may be accepted that the reference to 'Nigganțas' is to the Digambara Jains. But to say that they were the only rival sect for the Buddhists in South India is to misinterpret the pilgrim's account. There is absolutely nothing in the pilgrim's accounts which warrants such an inference. On the other hand we have ample evidence to attribute the decline of Buddhism to the activities of the Brahmins.

---

1. Mr. K. P. P. Menon has ably answered most of the arguments of Mr. Logan. See History of Kerala Vol. 1. PP. 42 - 76.

2. M. M. D. P. 274.

Another argument in support of the view that the Brahmins had not come into Kerala before the 8th century A. D. is that the settlement deed of the Jews at Cranganore is not attested by the Brahmin hierarchy whereas the Brahmins have attested the Syrian deed. It is concluded from this that the Brahmins came into the country or acquired power and infliuence during the period between the dates of these two deeds.[1] If this reasoning is correct the rise of Vedic Brahmanism on the Malabar coast cannot be placed earlier than the latter half of the 7th or the beginning of the 8th century and not latter than 774 A.D. It is indeed curious to argue that since no Brahmins have attested the Jewish deed there were no Brahmins in the country at that time. If we accept this argument then we will have to conclude that there were no Syrian Christians or Ilavas in the country at that time because they too have not attested the deed! It would be puerile to argue that the Brahmins had not come into Kerala simply because they are not mentioned in a deed given by the King to one small community in the country. Also it must be pointed out that the dates assigned to the Jewish and Syrian deeds and accepted by Mr. Logan (Viz. 700 A. D. for the J. P. C. 774 A. D. for the S. C. P. I and 824 A. D. for S. C. P. II) are not accepted by all scholars. There are some who assign these deeds to the period 10th—14th century A. D. Would it be argued that the Brahmin religion was introduced into Kerala only after the 10th century?

Another theory about the advent of the Brahmins is that they were brought into Kerala by Mayura Varman, the Kadamba king of Banavasi. There are two

---

1. M. M. D. P. 275.

versions about it, one in Canarese tradition and the other in Maratha tradition.[1] The Canarese account says that Mayura varman's son invited a large colony of Brahmins and located them in Kerala, Tuluva and other countries. It was after this, the Canarese account says, that Parasurama brought into Kerala sixtyfour Brahmin families. The Maratha account says that Parasurama converted fishermen into Brahmins. These Brahmins were cursed by Parasurama who got disgusted with them for their troubling him too often with their complaints. They lost the purity of their caste and so Mayuravarman brought some Brahmins and established them in different parts of his country.

Mr. Logan has assigned Mayuravarman to the last years of 7th and the early years of the 8th century A.D. This date of course strengthens his theory that the Brahmins came to the country only in the 8th century A.D. But this date is not accepted as correct by many scholars. However, without complaining about the accuracy of this date, let us examine whether these traditions contain any historical truth. The Maratha account attributes the peopling of Kerala to Parasurama. But it stretches the Parasurama tradition to accomodate Mayuravarman, and says that the latter brought purer Brahmins into Kerala. Anyhow it admits that there were Brahmins in Kerala before Mayura varman's time. But the Canerese account says that Parasurama came to the country with the Brahmin families after Mayura varman. This would place Parasurama the famous hero of the Puranas somewhere in the 8th century A.D.! These traditions carry in them their own refutation. Mayuravarman must have been responsible for introduc-

1. Mysore Gazetteer, Vol. II, Part II, PP. 498-99.

ing Brahmins into his territories, *viz.* Banavasi. In fact there are strong historical traditions to prove that he encouraged the Brahmin colonisation in his regions. But there is absolutely no evidence in support of the contention that Brahmins were introduced into Kerala by him.

Mr. Logan brings forward a very interesting theory that before the 8th century A.D. the Malayalees were observing 'un-Hindu' customs like burial of the dead instead of cremation. The change came with the advent of the 'God-compelling' Brahmins. Originally, it is said, the Malayalees used to keep the bones of their dead in stupas on the belief that "so long as the bones remained undisturbed and undefiled so long did the soul enjoy heaven." But with the advent of the vedic Brahmins a new system was introduced. "Their (the Brahmins) sonorious mantrams and spells could compel the Gods to take the wandering ghosts of even the worst of men direct to heaven. There was no necessity for costly death houses and for furnishing such with all the deceased's weapons and implements in use by him during life." Thus according to Mr. Logan the Brahmins in the 8th century introduced the practice of cremation and the observance of the Sraddha ceremonies into Kerala.

Mr. Logan's theory is based on two assumptions, (1) that burial was the universal practice in Kerala till the 8th century A.D. (2) that it is not a Hindu custom. Mr. Logan gives no convincing reasons in support of the first assumption. It is a conclusion which he draws from the "numerous stone monuments of the country." He is inclined to believe that this was the practice prevalent in the country till the 8th century on the authority of "one of the numerous Chinese pilgrims who

flocked at this time to India." These are certainly very slender grounds for concluding that burial was the universal practice in Kerala till the 8th century A.D. Even If we accept this to be correct Mr. Logan's assumption that it is a non-Hindu custom cannot be accepted. Eminent Hindu scholars have proved that the practice of burial was not at all foreign to the Hindus.[1] They even point out certain passages of the Vedas in support of their view. So, even if this practice had existed in Kerala, it cannot be deduced from it that Hinduism had not existed in the country.

Mr. Justice Narayna Marar, dealing with the period of the arrival of the Namboodiries in Malabar in the *Malabar Quarterly Review* has expressed an opinion that the Namboodiries came to Malabar earlier than the 4th century and later than the 1st century A.D.[2] His argument is based on the view that the Namboodiries are strict followers of the later development of the Hindu religion which bears the impress of Buddhistic influences. "They are followers of a later Hinduism which is the outcome of the action of Buddhistic teachings and influences on the earlier Hinduism of the ancient Aryans and which is the religion of the Hindus throughout India at the present day. And this points to the conclusion

---

1. Five methods af disposing off the dead were known to people in South India even as eorly as the 1st century A.D. The *Manimekalai* makes specific reference to these in Chapter VI. 11. 66 and 67.

> *சுடுவோர் இடுவோர் தொடுகுழிப் படும்போர்*
> *தாழ்வழினடைப் போர் தாழியிற்கவிப்போர்.*

These five methods are (1) cremation (2) exposing the dead bodies to the vultures (3) Burial (4) Burial in urns (5) Burial of superannuated persons in jars on their consent.

2. See Mr. K. P. P. Menon's reply to the arguments of Mr. Marar in the History of Kerala. Vol. I. PP. 70—76.

that the Namboodiries must have come to Malabar after the changes enumerated above had been completely effected in the religion and practices of the Hindus by the influence and example of Buddhism." Mr. Marar's opinion that the religion of the Namboodiries bears the impress of Buddhistic influences can be readily accepted. But we need not keep the Namboodiries outside Kerala to be influenced by Buddhism. As we have proved in this thesis, Buddhism had spread into this country even in the centuries before the Christian Era and it must have influenced the religion of the Brahmins of the country who had colonised there long ago. To say that the Namboodiries came to Kerala after their religion had come under the influence of Buddhism, presumes that there was no chance of their religion being influenced by Buddhism within Kerala. But we have already shown in this thesis that Buddhism was a potent influence on the religious life of the peeple of Kerala, and it is natural to conclude that the changes which Mr. Marar notices in the religion of the Namboodiries as a result of Buddhistic influences took place in Kerala itself.

An examination of the ancient Tamil classics like the *Padirrupattu*, the *Silappadikaram* and the *Manimekalai* will easily convince us that the Vedic religion was prevalent in Kerala when Buddhism flourished there. The references to the Brahmins and the vedic gods are so numerous in these epic that they are bound to catch the attention of any one who reads them. The *Padirrupattu* makes a special reference to Mahavishnu[1] at the Trivandrum temple. We find references to

1. St. 31.

கமழ் குரற்றுழா அயலங்கற் செல்வன்

The commentator says,

செல்வன் என்றது திருவனந்தபுரத்து திருமாலை.

Arundati,[1] Murugan,[2] Sukra,[3] Durga[4] etc. Also we find references to 'Brahmadayam'[5] or free gifts to Vedic Brahmins. Liberal endowments to temples are also mentioned.[6] The references to vedic deities are more numerous in the *Silappadikaram.* The first chapter[7] opens with praises to Surya, Chandra, Indira and Varuna of the vedic literature. There are innumerable references in the epic to deities like Siva,[8] Baladeva, Subrahmania,[10] Vishnu,[11] Lakshmi,[12] Saraswathi,[13] Brahma[14] and Krishna.[15] Commenting on the influence of the vedic culture and religion in South India during the *Silappadikaram* epoch Mr. Ramachandra Dikshitar says:

---

1. St. 31 1 28.
   செம்மீனனையாளின் தொன்னகரிச்செல்வி
2. St. 11.
   ஆருடைமுழுமுதல் நடுக்கத்த பேரிசைக் கடுந்திறை விறல்வேள்.
3. St. 13.
   அழன் சென்ற மருங்கின் வெள்ளி யோடாது
4. St. 79.
   கடவுள் அயிரையினிலை
5. St. 20.
   பதிபெரு விறல் ஊர்தார்த்தந்து பிறர்க்குதவி
   Here the commentator says
   உம்பற்காட்டு ஐஞ்ஞூர் **பிரமதாயம் கொடுத்து**
6. St. 15.
   புரைவயிற் புறைவயிற் பெரிய நல்கி
   The commentary here is
   உயர்ந்த தேவாலயமுள்ள இடங்களிலே உயர்ந்த ஆபரண முள்ளிட்டவற்றை கொடுத்து.
7. *Silappadikaram* Canto. I. 11. 1—12
8. Canto. II 1—3; V. 11. 169—172. XII. 11. 22—25; XIV. 11. 1—14. etc.
9. Canto. V. 11. 169—173, XIV. 11, 1—14 etc.
10. Canto. V. 11, 169—173, XIV, 11, 1—14 etc.
11. Canto. VIII, 11, 1—5, X, 11, 5—14, XI, 11. 35—39 etc.
12. Canto. XII, 11, 60—64. Ch. VI, 11, 60-61 etc,
13. Canto. XII, 11, 60—64, XXII Vemba etc.
14. Canto. XII, 11, 60—64, XXII, 11, 36—37 etc.
15. Canto. XVI, 11 40—53 etc.

" The life described in the *Silappadikaram* is generally permeated by Aryan concepts and Aryan religious ideas......................The author of the *Silappadikaram* must have had first hand knowledge of the Sanskrit works on drama and music as well as of the epics and the Puranas." The references to the vedic religion are equally numerous in the *Manimekalai.* The author of the *Manimekalai* has liberally drawn many stories from the puranic literature and we find references to some of the stories and heroes of the epics like the *Ramayana* [1] and the *Mahabharata.*[2] Sages like Viswamitra,[3] Agastya,[4] Vasishta[5] and Parasurama[6] are mentioned in the *Manimekalai* besides the Vedic deities like Saraswathi [7] Lakshmi,[8] and Vishnu.[9] The great influence of the Vedic religion in the Chera country is amply proved by the references to the various 'heretic systems' which we find in Book 27 of the *Manimekalai* Manimekalai the heroine of the epic who comes to Vanji is asked by the chaste goddess to assume the form of an old hermit and go to the votaries of the various sects to study the truth of their faiths. *Manimekalai* goes to " the temples to the platforms, to the halls, to the gardens, to the tanks wherever those devoted to penance those who by discipline had attained to the control of their passions, those who by great learning had attained to the knowledge of the right path all round the forti-

1. Bk. V. 1, 37, Bk XVII, 11, 9—16 etc.
2. Bk III, 11, 146-147 etc.
3. Bk. XI, 11, 84—37 etc.
4. Preface 1—11 etc.
5. Bk. XIII, 11, 95-96 etc.
6. Bk. XXII, 11, 34-35 etc.
7. Preface 1—60 etc.
8. Bk, XVI, 1, 34 etc,
9. Bk, III, 1, 124 etc,

fications of the city."[1] The votaries of the Veda seem to have been sufficiently important and large in numbers to arrest Manimekalai's attention first. The leader of the 'Vedavadis' tells her that there were three teachers recognised as of authority among them; they were Vedavyasa, Kratakoti and Jaimini. There were ten recognised "instruments of knowledge."

On the basis of these "instruments of knowledge" there were six systems current in the country. They were Lokayata, Bauddha, Sankhya, Nayyayika, Vaiseshika, and Mimamsa. These six systems mentioned in the *Manimekalai* as current in the country at that time differ from the orthodox systems which are now generally accepted. The Vaidika systems which are now accepted are Vaiseshika and Nyaya, Sankya and Yoga and the Purva and Uttara Mimamsas. Probably when the *Manimekalai* was written Mimamsa was treated as one and Lokayatam included among the Vaidika systems. Dr. S. K. Iyengar, points out that it is very strange that the Bauddha religion should be included among the systems to which the Vaidika bramanas applied.[2] But it is stated so in the *Manimekalai*. It is also significant that there is no reference to the Yoga system. Sankya is treated by itself without any association with Yoga.

There were many Saiva vadis, Brahma vadis and Vaishnava vadis in the Chera capital.[3] The Saiva vadi tells Manimekalai in response to her inquiry that he might explain his system "that the two lights (the sun and the moon) the doer and the five elements

1. *The Manimekalai* Bk. 27.
2. Manimekalai in its historical setting. P. 68.
3. *The Manimekalai* Bk. 27.

constitute the basis from out of which human beings are made by combination of life and body. He who does this is constituted of the Kalas." The Brahmavadi tells her that "the whole universe is the outcome of one egg brought forth by the supreme being Brahma." The votary of Vishnu tells her that "Narayana is the protector of all." Even though the *Manimekalai* makes reference to the votaries of Siva and Vishnu separately there is no other evidence to warrant the inference that there was any sectarian spirit among the followers of the orthodox religion. The rivalry between the Saiva and Vaishnava cults was only a later growth. It is not possible to say from an examination of the statements of the *Silappadikaram* or the *Manimekalai* whether a certain person was Saiva or Vaishnava in his creed. No person described in any one of these epics can be marked exclusively a Saiva or a Vaishnava. A good example is the famous Chera prince Chenguttavan. On the eve of his expedition to the north he goes to the Siva temple and circumambulates it. At this time the priests of the temple of Atakamatam the local Vaishnava temple gives him 'prasadam' (garland of flowers) which he wears on his shoulders.[1]

---

1. The *Silappadikaram* Canto, 26. 11. 50—66.

The commentator of the [illegible] A[illegible]raiasriar has identified Atakamatam with the [illegible] temple at Trivandrum. But scholars like R. Raghava Iyengar & Ramachandra Dikshitar think that this identification is wrong. They are inclined to identify this temple in or near Karur. Mr. Dikshitdar says "Adakamatam is probably a reference to the Vaishnava temple that is now found in the suburb of Karur. For it is a far cry from Trivandrum to the capital Vanji. To have carried the Prasadam all that way would have taken several days in those times of slow communication and difficult transport. It is impossible to think that the news of the march had reached distant Trivandrum and made the temple authorities go post-haste even to Cranganore for the sake of argument, or to Karur to bless that king. It is remarkable that there is no trace of such a Vaishnava temple near or about Cranganore," Silappadikaram P. 295 Note 2.

Mr. K. G. Sesha Aiyar's views on this subject are expressed in J. I. H. 1932, PP. 135—163.

All these evidences which we have examined above clearly prove that the Brahmin religion was prevalent in Kerala when Buddhism flourished there. We can safely conclude that Brahmanism had been prevalent in Kerala even before Kerala came under the influeuce of Buddhism.

CHAPTER X.

INFLUENCE OF BUDDHISM ON KERALA

ANY religion which flourishes in a country for a long period is bound to leave some permanent traces of its influences on the life and habits of the people there. But it is difficult to gauge accurately the extent of this influence in the case of Buddhism in Kerala, as the religion was completely wiped out of existence from the country.

The general influence exercised by Buddhism on the vedic religion has been acknowledged by many scholars. Prof. Altekar says: " The growth and the developement of Hindu religion and philosophy, literature and social customs, art and architecture have been profoundly influenced by the Buddhistic movement. It is in fact difficult to imagine what Indian culture would have been like if it had not been enriched by the manifold influences radiating from Buddhism."[1] The great influence exerted by Buddhism on some of the Hindu reformers and thinkers of the early centuries deserves special emphasis. The steady growth and popularity of Buddhism in different parts of India was an eye-opener to the champions of the Hindu religion and they came forward for the task of reforming their religion. Some of them took particular care in incorporating the most appealing and practicable of the tenets of Buddhism into Hinduism. By purging Hinduism of the evils which had crept into its folds and by adopting whatever was best in Buddhism they were able to make

1, "Contribution of Buddhism to Hindu culture" Prof, A.S. Altekar Mahabodhi Vol, 50, P, 132,

Hinduism once again the premier religion of the country. Among those who contributed richly to the revival of Hinduism as a powerful religion of the people the name of Sankara comes first. It was Sankara who infused a new courage and strength into the minds of millions of Hindu religionists and liberated Hinduism from its cobwebs of inertia and senility. The vedic religion had been smitten with a sort of decripitude and it was Sankara who galvanised it with a new message and a mission. What is significant in our present discussion is that this great Sankara was the product of an age and place profoundly influenced by Buddhism. When we remember that Sankara was born in Kerala and was greatly influenced by his enviroments we can imagine to some extent how great the influence of Buddhism had been in Kerala. The fact that Kerala produced a Sankara is very significant in estimating the influence of Buddhism in that country.

It is generally believed that Sankara flourished in the 9th century A. D.[1] Sankara belonged to the Namboodiri sect of Brahmins and was born at Kaladi in North Travancore. Tradition says that Siva was the family deity and that Sankara was by birth a Sakta. Early in his youth he went to a vedic school presided over by Govinda, the pupil of Gaudapada. Govinda taught him the elementary principles of Advaita which he later perfected. It is said that even at the age of eight Sankara had mastered all the vedas. "Before he learned

---

1. According to Telang Sankara lived about the middle or end of the 6th century A. D. Sir R. G. Bhandarkar proposes A. D. 680 as the date of Sankara's birth and is even inclined to go a few years earlier. Maxmullar and Prof. Macdonnell hold that he was born in A. D. 788 and that he died in A.D 820. Prof. Keith also is of opinion that he flourished in the first quarter of the 9th century.

the ways of the world, he rejected them and became a Sanyasin. But he was no passionless recluse. He wandered as a teacher from place to place engaging in discussions with the leaders of other schools of thought." [1] He established four mutts or monasteries of which the chief is the one at Sringeri in the Mysore Province. The others are at Puri, Dvaraka and Badarinath.

The extent of Buddhistic influence on Sankara's thought and activities can hardly be exaggerated. As Dr. S. Radhakrishnan says " Buddhism created in the region of thought a certain atmosphere from which no mind could escape and it undoubtedly exercised a far reaching influence on Sankara's mind." The atmosphere in which Sankara was brought up was saturated with Buddhistic thought and Sankara's alert mind assimilated what was best in it. We can find strong Buddhistic influences in the lives and teachings of Sankara's great masters. Gaudapada the master of Govinda, Sankara's master, lived at a time when Buddhism was widely prevalent. Gaudapada was quite familiar with Buddhistic doctrines and he accepted many of them. His liberal views enabled him to accept doctrines associated with Buddhism and adjust them to the Advaita system.[2] Some even believe that Gaudapada was a Buddhist. An analysis of Sankara's teachings shows that some of his doctrines are carved out from Buddhistic philosophy. Sankara's doctrine of 'Maya' and conception of 'Moksha' are clearly Buddhistic in character. " Sankara's conception of 'moksha' (freedom) is not much different from the Buddhistic view of

---

1. Indian Philosophy. Vol. II. S. Radhakrishnan P. 448.

2. Ibid P. 464.

'Nirvana.' If, we introduce the reality of an absolute 'brahman' into early Buddhism we find the Advaita Vedanta again."[1] Again, Sankara's doctrine of monasticsm may be considered to have been borrowed from Buddhism. He felt the necessity of a monastic order of devoted workers analogous to the 'sanghas' of the Buddhists. "He learned from the Buddhist church that discipline, freedom from superstition, and ecclesiastical organisation help to preserve the faith clean and strong." Again, Sankara tried to reform the religion in the light of criticisms levelled against it by the Buddhists. He realised that some of the evil practices which had crept into the Hindu religion had made it vulnerable for attacks from Buddhist propogandists, and so while reviving the popular religion he also purified it. Sakta worship had assumed certain ugly forms in South India and Sankara sternly put down its grosser manifestations. He also condemned the practice of branding the body with hot metallic designs. In all these things we find the profound influence exercised by Sankara's Buddhistic environments on him. In some Indian traditions Sankara is even considered as a Buddhist in disguise—a "Prachchanna Buddha." Traditions opposed to Sankara dismiss off his 'Mayavada' as crypto-Buddhism. In the *Padma Purana*, Siva is said to have declared to Parvati; "The theory of Maya is a false doctrine, a disguised form of Buddhism. I myself, O Goddess, propounded this theory in the Kaliyuga in the form of a Brahmin." The concluding words of Siva in the *Padma Purana* are to the effect that "that great system the 'Maya' theory is not supported by the Veda, though it contains the truth of the Veda." Shortly after Sankara had established the

3. Ibid P. 473.

orthodoxy of the Maya Vada, opponents of the view maintained that it was nothing more than a *re-chauffe* of Buddhism and so not in conformity with the Vedas. [1] There is a tendency among some scholars to ignore or minimise the influence of Buddhism on Sankara. It may be argued that Sankara developed the whole system from the Upanishads. It may also be contended that the similarities between the views of Buddhism and Advaita vedanta exist because both these systems had for their background the Upanishads. Sankara must have derived his inspirations ultimately from the Upanishads; but we cannot ignore the fact he was directly under the inspiring influence of Buddhism. His intellect was keen enough to assimilate the good things of Buddhism without identifying himself with the new religion. On the other hand his devotion to the vedic religion made him one of its most militant defenders from the inroads of Buddhism. The activities of Buddhists missionaries in his own country created in him an admiration for the nobler principles for which they stood, and an indignation in him against the methods by which they tried to disrupt the Hindu religion. Here we find Sankara at once an admirer and an enemy of Buddhism. The indifference of the priestly class to the great needs of the Hindu religion, the failure of the adherents of vedic Hinduism to defend it from the attacks of Buddhists, the consciousness of the defects of Hindu religious organisation *vis a vis* the Buddhist organisation—these were some of the factors which shaped the career of Sankara as a great teacher and reformer of Hinduism. In all these things, the great influence exercised by the environments in which Sankara was born and brought up, can hardly be ignored.

1. Ibid, p. 471.

Now we shall proceed to examine some specific instances of Buddhist influence on the religious and social life of the people of Kerala in general. There are ample evidences to show that after the disappearance of Buddhism from Kerala the Hindus adopted many Buddhist ceremonies and forms of worship. If one makes a critical study of the "utsavas" in the Hindu temples of Kerala, one will be able to notice many important Buddhistic features in them. It is now a generally accepted fact that Buddhism has left its influence on the forms and methods of religious worship in all places where it had once flourished. But in Malabar the influence of Buddhism on Hindu forms of worship seems to be more distinct and permanent. One of the reasons for this is that Buddhism as such did not disappear from Kerala, but it only dissolved itself into the sea of Kerala Hinduism. Kerala Hinduism is elastic enough to accomodate in its folds religious systems of any form or variety. When Buddhism was absorbed into Hinduism in Kerala some of its impressive ceremonies and forms of worship which had become very popular, were continued in Hindu temples. Commenting on this subject Mr. K. Padmanabhan Tampi in a very short note on Kerala Buddhism in the Travancore census Report (1931) makes the following observation :— "All the present-day paraphernalia of popular worship, the temples, images, processions, utsavams, etc., were borrowed straight from Buddhism almost in an unchanged form."[1] Dr. N. Kunjan Pillai in another short note on Kerala Buddhism in the same Report makes the same observation. He says: "Though Buddhism was ultimately crushed out of the country it had left its impress upon Hinduism. Most of

1. Travancore Census Report 1931, p. 351,

the appurtenances of modern Hinduism such as temples, worship of images, 'utsavams' and religious processions were all borrowed from Buddhists."[1] These observations are no doubt very sweeping in their nature. They should only be taken to mean that Hinduism borrowed many of the ceremonies and customs of Buddhist worship.

Among the different 'utsavas' or festivals in the Hindu temples of Kerala, the one which still retains its Buddhist features very distinctly is the 'Kettu Kalcha Utsavam' which is very popular in Central Travancore. The popularity of this festival in the temples of Central Travancore is very significant. The majority of ancient Buddhist images we have come across in Kerala are in Central Travancore, and from this we have concluded that Buddhism was very popular in this region. It is in these temples of Central Travancore that the "Kettu Kalcha" festival is very popular even now. The biggest of these festivals is the one at the Bagavati temple at 'Chettikulangara' a place three miles from Mavelikara. In the Bagavati temple at Mavelikara too this festival is celebrated. The festival comes off on the 'Bharani' star in the month of "Kumbam" (February-March) at Chettikulangara and on the same star in the month of "Meenam" (March-April) at Mavelikara. This festival is commonly called "Kumbam Bharani" and "Meenam Bharani." The "Bharani" is the most important day for the Hindus of the place—a day of great rejoicing and splendour. The most important feature of the festival is that people of the different 'Karas,' bring to the central shrine huge 'Rathams' or cars varying from 25 to 150 feet in height. smaller ones are called "Teru" and the bigger ones 'Kutira'. They are usually made of

1. Ibid. p. 334.

bamboo or cocoanut wood and will be very tastefully decorated with white cloth and coloured silk. The 'Teru' and 'Kutira' will be several stories in height and they present the appearance of huge pagodas. There will be imges or pictures of Hindu Gods and Goddesses inside these cars. Smaller cars are taken on the shoulders of the people of the 'Kara' while bigger ones are drawn on four wheels. All the people of the 'Kara' join in making the cars or taking them in procession to the main shrine. The different 'Terus' belonging to the different 'Karas' will be placed on the four sides of the temple compound and then they will be taken round the temple for "Pradikshana."[1] This impressive festival of 'Bharani' is supposed to be a continuation of the Buddhist ceremonies in ancient Kerala. Fa-Hsien the famous Chinese traveller of the 5th century A. D. has described a Buddhist festival which he saw in the city of Pataliputra. This Buddhist festival bears very close resemblance to the "Kettu kalcha" festival which we have described above. We shall quote Fa-Hsien's description of the Buddhist festival :- "Of all the countries of Central India this has the largest cities and towns. Its people are rich and thriving and emulate one another in practising charity of heart and duty to ones neighbour. Regularly every year on the eighth day of the second moon they have a procession of images. They make a four-wheeled car of five stories by lashing together bamboos, and these stories are supported by posts in the form of crescent-claded halberds. The car is over twenty feet in height, and in form like a pagoda, and it is draped with a kind

---

1. Till very recently the 'Terus' brought by the Ilavas, Pulayas and other such castes were not allowed to be taken into the temple compound. But with the temple entry proclamation of the Maharaja of Travancore 'Terus' of all castes can be taken round the temple in "Pradikshana."

of white cashmere, which is painted in various colours. They make images of Devas ornamented with gold, silver and strass and with silk banners and canopies overhead. At four sides they make niches each with a Buddha sitting inside and a Bodhisatva in attendance. There may be some twenty cars, all beautifully ornamented and different from one another. On the abve mentioned day all the ecclesiastics and laymen in the district assemble; they have singing and high class music and make offerings of flowers and incense."[1]

The 'Kettu kalcha' festival has all the features described by Fa-Hsien and this strengthens our theory that it is a characterstic Buddhist festival borrowed by the Hindus of Kerala. We do not overlook the fact that car festivals are popular in many other centres of Hindu worship. There are some scholars who contend that the whole idea of 'car festival'—in whatever form we may find them—is borrowed from the Buddhists. Whatever may be the truth of this we can say without fear of contradiction that the 'Barani Utsavas' of Kerala retain many striking Buddhistic features.[2]

The part played by Buddhist monks in the spread of learning in Kerala deserves special mention. The Buddhist monks appear to have been pioneers in the field of education. They had numerous charity establishments associated with their Viharas and these served as centres for the spread of learning. "Monasteries became

1. The travels of Fa-Hsien. Translated by H. A. Giles. P. 47.

2. It is pointed out by some that the temple processions in Kerala today retain many Buddhistie features The elephant procession with its paraphernalia of 'Muthukkuta' 'Alavattam' 'Venjamaram' etc has very striking resemblance to the processions of the Buddehists. Of course these processions are not peculiar to Kerala. In fact it is contended that the Hindus in general borrowed the idea of processions from the Buddhists.

cultural centres both for the monk and the laity. It was the monastery that imparted education both to the members of the order and the lay followers; it was the monastery that arranged for public sermons for the enlightenment of the general population; it was the monastery that possessed the biggest library and helped the cause of the multiplication of books by getting them copied."[1] The old Malayalam term for an elementary school is 'Eluthupalli.' The term 'Palli' was used by the Buddhists in ancient Kerala to refer to their Viharas. In Modern Malayalam the term 'Palli' is used by the Christians, Muhammedans and Jews to refer to their places of worship. The Hindus in Kerala never refer to their temple as 'Palli'. Their temples are called 'Kovil' or 'Nata' or 'Ambalam' or (in Sanskrit) Kshetram.[2] 'Pallai' was originally a place of worship for the 'Bauddhas' and so the places of worship of all the Bauddhas—Christians, Jews, Muslims—came to be known as 'Palli.' Some of the places where we find Buddhist vigrahas are called 'Pallikkal.' We have already referred to this in our chapter on Buddhist vestiges in Travancore. 'Eluthu Palli' must have got that name as it was originally under the guidance of the Bauddha monks and control of the Buaddha Pallis. In ancient Kerala

1. The *Mahabodht*, Vol. 5. PP. 132-138

2. Even though the Hindus do not call their temples by name Palli that term is used by them in many religious contexts. For e.g. 'Pallikurup' 'Pallivetta,' 'Palli Ambari', 'Palli Ara,' 'Mata Palli' 'Tita Palli,' 'Palliteru,' 'Palli Samkam' etc.

Palli is also used now as a respectful-term to refer to things connected with the kings of Kerala. For eg. 'Pallikettu' 'Palli urakkam' 'Palli neerattu' 'Palli manjal' 'Palli vayana' etc.

There are many places in Kerala with names ending in Palli, e.g. Idapalli, Kanjirapalli, Karthikapalli, Karunagapalli, Puthupalli, Malla palli, etc. It is calculated that in Travancore alone there are 19 places ending with "Palli".

there used to be an 'Eluthu Palli' attached to every Bauddha Palli. In ancient days every child in Kerala used to be initiated into his first lessons in reading and writing with a formal invocation to Jina or Buddha. 'Namosthu Jina' was the familier prayer with which every student began his first lesson. But this was later replaced by the modern invocation to Ganapathi ('Hari Sri Ganapathaya Nama'.) Jina may be interpreted by some to mean Mahavira, but it was also one of the popular names by which the Buddha was known in South India.[1]

The contribution of the Buddhists to the development of the Tamil literature—the literature of ancient Cheranadu—is not properly appreciated or estimated. The policy of the Buddhist monks everywhere was to preach their religion in the language of the people in their particular localities. The early Buddhist monks popularised the Tamil language among the masses and produced many works in Tamil. The *Kundalakesi*[2] generally assigned to the 8th century A.D. is counted among the five great 'Kavyas' in Tamil language. Another Buddhist work of great interest is the *Vimbasara kadai.* " The *Siddhanatt togai*, apparently a work of a doctrinal nature and the *Tiruppadikam* in praise of the Buddha and his acts are other works known by citations in commentaries. Quite a number of beautiful verses have been preserved in citation in the *Yapparungalam* and in the *Virasoliam* on the Buddha

1. We can give ample evidences to prove that the Buddha was very commonly referred to as 'Jina' in South India. In the *Manimekalai* when Aravana Adigal begins his exposition of Buddhism to the heroine he says:- "The first teacher is Jinendra ". *Manimekalai*, Bk. 29.

2. The *Kundalakesi* deals with the story of a Vysia girl and her love for a Buddhist youth who had been condemned to death for his daring thefts. Both the hero and the heroine find their salvation through the Buddha.

from works even the names of which have not been preserved.",[1]

The influence of Buddhism in extolling the ideal of 'Dharma' in Kerala should be specially mentioned. It is argued by some scholars that Travancore and Cochin acquired the title of "Dharma Rajyam" because of the prominence of Buddhism in these countries in ancient times. The motto of the Travancore royal family is "Dharmosmath kula daivatam" or "charity is our household divinity." We cannot accept the view that these countries came to be called "Dharma Rajyams" mainly because of the popularity of Buddhism in Kerala. We may say that Buddhism was one of the important influences which tended to extol the principle of Dharma in the country. Mr. Gopinatha Rao says that Travancore and Cochin acquired the reputation of "Dharma Rajyams" because of the mass-scale gratis feeding which the princes and nobles of these states were undertaking through the "Uttupurai" institutions (feeding houses). He says :—"This ancient institution which was maintained out of the rich donations made for the purpose by liberal kings and pious individuals in the past under government supervision, remained from time immemorial the just pride of the kings of the Malabar coast............... It is this gratis feeding of the indigent poor that earned for these two native states (Cochin and Travancore) the name of 'Dharma Rajya' by which name they are even now referred to by people outside these states."[2] Feeding the poor had been considered to be one

1 Commenting on the contribution of the Buddhists towards the growth of the Tamil literature prof. K. A. N. Sastri observes :- "That the Bauddhas were not indifferent to the cultivation of Tamil and made important contributions in that language to the literature of Buddhism is not a matter for mere surmise." The *Mahabhothi*, Vol. 50. P. 163.

2. T. A. S. Vol II. P. 6.

of the solemn duties of the princes of Kerala from very ancient times. Tamil literature contains praises of several ancient sovereigns of the Chera country as great givers of food. Purun Jorru Udiyar Cheral Adan is said to have fed the contending armies of the Pandavas and the Kauravas in the great Mahabharata war! Another king Imayavaramban Nedumcheral Adan—is said to have been—very enthusiastic in offering food to all those who visited him. Owing to the enormous number of his guests he felt a shortage of hands for adequately supplying their needs and consequently urged even the princesses of the household to work in the kitchen! Thus from very ancient times the rulers of Kerala had acquired a reputation as great 'Annadatas' (givers of food). The 'Uttupurais' of ancient Kerala were thrown open to people of all castes and denominations irrespective of any distinction. But in later centuries these 'feeding houses' came to be accessible only to the Brahmins. Mr. Gopinatha Rao's explanation that the Kerala kingdoms came to be called "Dharma Rajyams" because of these 'Uttupurai' institutions is too narrow in its scope. Feeding the poor is only one of the aspects of Dharma which the Kerala rulers pursued. We have already seen that Kerala was an important centre of humanitarian activities of Asoka. R. E. II speaks of the two kinds of hospitals—hospitals for men and hospitals for beasts—which the great Buddhist king caused to be introduced into the country. "Healing herbs, medicines for men and medicines for beasts were every where imported and planted. In like manner roots and fruits were imported and planted. On the roads trees had been planted and wells had been dug for the use of man and beast." Particular mention must be made here of the practice in Travancore of giving "Dharma-Pullu" or "charity grass" to the cows under the supervision of the Revenue

officers in the different Taluks. This was a specific item of expenditure in every office; and this practice had been in existence for a very long period. Providing amenities for men and beasts, feeding the poor and the cattle, and other such things were considered as the "Dharma" of the ancient rulers of Kerala. The part played by Buddhist monks and missionaries in the propagation of these great ideals of "Dharma" in the country cannot be ignored. It would not be wrong to say that Buddhism played an important part in making the kingdoms of Kerala "Dharma Rajyams."

There are some ancient temples in Kerala famous for the treatment they give for certain chronic diseases. In ancient days Buddha viharas were noted not only as places of worship but also as centres where treatment was given to patients. Asoka himself had instituted hospitals for both men and animals in the southern kingdoms. There is a temple at Tiruvidai in the taluk of Shertalla in Travancore where treatment is given to lunatics. There is another temple at Takali in the taluk of Ambalapula in Travancore where lepers are treated. The medicine administered to the patients is a medicated oil the prescription of which is said to be preserved in the temple. It seems reasonable to infer that these temples were originally Buddhist viharas.[1]

---

1. There is a treatise in Ayurveda called *Rasa Vaiseshika Sutra* written by one Bhadanta Nagarjuna. It has been edited and published as No. 8 of the Sri. Vanchi Sethu Lakshmi Series under the authority of the Travancore Government. The Editor of this treatise expresses the view that Bhadanta Nagarjuna was a Buddhist Sanyasin of ancient Kerala.

He thinks that Bhadanta Nagarjuna cannot be considered to be identical with Nagarjuna, the celebrated Buddhist Chemist and redactor of *Susruta Samhita*. The appellation, 'Bhadanta' he thinks is added to the name of Nagarjuna in order to distinguish him from others who bore a similar name. Naga is a common name assumed by the Nairs of Malabar and the Editor suggests the possibility of Bhadanta Nagarjuna being a Nair Buddhist monk of ancient Kerala.

But it must be pointed out here that the arguments of the Editor to prove that Bhadanta Nagarjuna was a Buddhist monk of the Nair caste are not very convincing. They are largely based on conjectures.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DECLINE OF BUDDHISM IN KERALA.

FROM the writings of the Chinese traveller Yuan Chwang, we gather that the decline of Buddhism in Kerala and the adjoining regions had become marked by the 7th century A. D. The statement of the Chinese traveller is amply corroborated by the evidences supplied by the Tamil literature of this period. During this period South India witnessed a strenuous war of religions in which Vaishnavism and Saivism carried on an active campaign against Buddhism and Jainism. Jainism figures very prominently in this strife, but Buddhism seems to have been definitely relegated to a subordinate position.

The decline of Buddhism had become prominent by the 7th century A.D.; but the religion continued to be an important influence in South India for a period of another three centuries. Even though Buddhism was vanquished it was not completely obliterated till about the 10th century A.D. Commenting on the extent of the influence of Buddhism in South India during this period Prof. K. A. N. Sastri says: "From the seventh to the tenth centuries the Pandyas and the Pallavas divided the Tamil country between them till the Cholas woke up from their long slumber and made rapid strides to hegemony in the whole land. Epigraphy and literature, indigenous and foreign, bear testimony to the not inconsiderable part played by Buddhism throughout the period. There is also some evidence from monuments which impresses us by its significance though not by its volume." Prof. Sastri is inclined to think that Buddhism

held a considerable place in South India till the 14th century A.D. or even latter.[1] But we are not in a position to give any sound evidence to prove the popularity of Buddhism in Kerala after the 10th century A.D. The famous Buddhistic inscription of king Vikramaditya Varaguna of South Travancore, as we have seen, is assigned to the 9th century A. D. The Pandya ruler Rajasimha II (C. 900-920 A.D.) is said to have established numerous 'Palliccandams' *i.e.* Buddha and Jaina endowments, in addition to endowing several 'brahma deyas' and 'devadanas'.[2] But among the several princes who ruled over the different principalities which now constitute Kerala, Varaguna of the 9th century seems to have been the last prince to take any interest in Buddhism.

Now, we shall proceed to examine the causes which led to the decline of Buddhism in the country. Before we examine the specific causes which led to the decline of Buddhism in Kerala, we shall examine the general causes which were responsible for the ultimate failure of that religion. An examination of the general causes for the decline of Buddhism is necessary for the study of the causes which led to its failure in Kerala, because all these general factors affected the fortunes of Buddhism in Kerala also.

Mr. Barth's observations about the decline of Buddhism are very significant. He says: "Buddhism became extinct from sheer exhaustion and it is in its own inherent defects we must especially seek for the causes of its disappearance."[1] Buddhism arose as a sort of reaction

1. The *Mahabodhi*, Vol. 50. p. 157.
2. The Pandyan Kingdom. K. A. N. Sastri, p. 80.
1. Religions of India. A. Barth, P. 136.

to Brahmanism and at the time of its inception it had a particular mission and a gospel. The questoin "how to liberate man from the trammels of the world" has been confronting religious thinkers from very ancient times, long before the Sakyamuni gave his attention to it. But the approach of the Buddha to this great question had an appealing novelty and a winning uniqueness which soon made his teachings extremely popular. The Buddha's teachings and philosophy had their genesis and background in vedic Hinduism. It is not an exaggeration to say that Buddhism without its background of Brahmanism would have been impossible. What the Sakyamuni did was to lay before his followers a new way of life different from the one followed by the Hindus till his time. Thus Buddhism was only a way of life which could not have the full claims of a religion. It thrived mainly because of its own merits and partly because of the defects of Hinduism as it existed in the Buddha's time. But when the defects in Hinduism were rectified one of the important factors that led to the success of Buddhism disappeared, and thus the decline of Buddhism commenced. For nearly ten centuries Buddhism had a mission in the country and when that mission was over the *raison d'etre* of Buddhism was lost to a great extent. There is no doubt whatever that Buddhism was smitten with premature senility; but among the many causes which contributed to reduce Buddhism to this helpless state of affairs, it is not difficult to discover some in Sakyamuni's teachings themselves. The "disregard for the supernatural" which was prominent in the Buddha's philosophy and teachings is one such cause. A religion without the incomprehensible and omnipotent Supernatural leaves a great vacuum to be filled up. The later innovation of the

idea of the Supernatural in Buddhism was a compromise with Brahmanism and as such not so very convincing or satisfactory as the latter. Another defect in Sakyamuni's preachings was that they were too abstract for a people with an exuberant imagination. The doctrines of Maya or Karma or Nirvana were too much for the average intellect. But there were no substitutes for these in Buddhism, because there could be no Buddhism without them. Buddhistic doctrines and logic were simple and convincing only to those who had reached the high standards of intellectual perfection, but to others they were only making the inscrutable still more inscrutable.

The Sangha which the Buddha founded served to some extent the purpose which was expected of it, but it proved in subsequent centuries to be a more rigid caste than the priestly caste which the Buddhists condemned. As Dr. Barth says, "in substituting the Sangha for the caste system of Brahmanism it created an institution far more illiberal and formidable to spiritual independence." The rigidity and exclusiveness of the Buddhist priestly order made it vulnerable to all the criticisms which the Buddhists themselves were levelling against the Brahmin priests.

Another important cause for the decline of Buddhism was the degeneracy and demoralisation which had crept into the Buddhist clergy. The Buddhist clergy who had raised their accusing finger at the corruption and moral deterioration of the Brahmin priestly class had now become guilty of the same offence in a worse degree. "The modest, pious and energetic wandering monks of the early days become in course of time fat priests attached to opulent monasteries and

instead of passionately preaching and appealing to the human heart, the later monks indulged in gerund-grinding and logic-chopping and in debasing Tantric practices."[1] The conquering zeal of the early centuries had died away and all boldness and true originality of thought had disappeared. As Dr. Barth says, the intellectual powers were exhausted in scholastic discussion or lulled to sleep in the midst of idle routine and a time came when it ceased to even give birth to heresies. The Sangha became steadily isolated from the laity with whom it ceased to have any real touch. As the Sangha had been the nerve centre of Buddhism from the very beginning the failure of the former spelled the decline of the latter.

The changes introduced into Buddhism to suit the tastes of its multitudinous and heterogeneous followers were so great that they practically destroyed the individuality of that religion. The transformation of early Buddhism into Mahayanism made the appeal of the religion wider; but the Neo-Buddhism which evolved as a result of the numerous innovations introduced into the faith differed so much from the ideals of the Buddha that it could hardly be called Buddhism. The Buddha envisaged 'Nirvana' as the immediate goal for every one whereas Neo-Buddhism treated it as a distant goal to be attained in the long run. The Buddha recommended self-effort and self-reliance for the realisation of the *Summum bonum* and discouraged all profitless speculation regarding the fundementals of metaphysics; but Neo-Buddhism gloried in metaphysics and theology and sanctioned the vain ceremonies and formalities condemned by the Buddha. The changes introduced into Buddhism no

1. College text book of Indian History R. Sathianatha Iyer, p. 360.

doubt made it very popular for a time; but in course of time they made Buddhism closely resemble the Brahmanism which the Buddha condemned. It was these changes which made it easy for Brahmanism to kill Buddhism by a fraternal embrace.

As the last of the general causes that led to the decline of Buddhism we shall examine religious persecution. We do not say that persecution was not an important factor in the decline of Buddhism. But what religious persecution did in India was only to hasten the death of Buddhism in India. The tragedy about Buddhism is that it failed at the first touch of persecution. Buddhism had been the pet child of royal patronage everywhere. But for Asoka, Buddhism would never have reached the status of a world religion and but for the enthusiastic patronage of kings like Kanishka, Harsha and hundreds like them in different parts of India, Buddhism would never have been so popular in the country. But when once Buddhism had to face Brahminical hostility unaided by princely favour or popular sympathy, the real test of the strength of that religion came in India. Buddhism could not come out successful in this struggle. Here lies the great contrast between Christianity and Buddhism. Christianity was born in persecution, it thrived in persecution and hence it was able to survive persecution. But Budddhism thrived under the protective wings of imperial patronage and when it had to face the active rivalry of awakened Hinduism it proved to be not equal to the occasion. We cannot say that Buddhism was a helpless victim of religious fanaticism. If Buddhism failed in the face of opposition it only shows the weakness of that religion. The opposition or hostility which Buddhism had to face in the later centuries was nothing new in India. India

was no stranger to the excesses of propagandism and we may as well say that it is Buddhism, she has to thank for her first lesson in this particular. Even the great Asoka is guilty of coercion to some extent. In his edict he says with evident pride and satisfaction that "the gods who were worshipped as true divinities in Jambudvipa have been rendered false, and this result is not the effect of my greatness, but of my zeal." Commenting on this Mr. Barth says: "Up to the present time there is nothing from a Brahmanic source to match this testimony so significant in its brevity."[1] It may be said however that Hindu persecution was extremely severe. It was persecution with a vengeance. The mere fact of entering a Buddhist sanctuary is reckoned in the list of sins for which there is no forgiveness. The disciples of Kumarila and Sankara constituted themselves as the rabid defenders of the orthodox faith and the Buddhists could not face their opposition for long. However, we may say that religious persecution only dealt the final blow to Buddhism which was already ripe for its fall.

The general causes for the decline of Buddhism which we have examined above, hold good in the case of the downfall of Buddhism in Kerala. But when we examine the various factors which led to the decline of the Buddhism in the Tamil countries, we are inclined to believe that religious persecution was the most important of them. Even though we included religious persecution as the last of the general causes which brought about the downfall of Buddhism in India, we are inclined to consider it as the chief cause for the complete disappearance of Buddhism from the south. No doubt,

1. Religions of India. P. 135.

Buddhistic organisation in South India had become weak and decadent by its own inherent defects. The fall of Buddhism in South India by "sheer exhaustion" was inevitable. But Buddhism would not have been so completely obliterated from these countries, but for the persistent, vigorous and militant activities of the defenders of the vedic faith. In no other part of India would Buddhism and Jainism have faced such organised and effective opposition as in the Tamil countries of the South. An examination of the religious activities of South India during the period of the Saiva Nayanars and Vaishnava Alvars—6th century A. D. to 10th century A. D.—will convince any one of the truth of our statement.

The period beginning with the 6th and ending with the 10th centuries A. D. is characterised by a great revival of Brahmanism which shook the non-vedic sects to their very foundations. The revival of Brahmanism manifested itself in two great religious movements—Saivism and Vaishnavism—which enveloped the entire Tamilnadu. The Saiva movement played a more important part than the Vaishnava, in the destruction of Buddhism in the Chera country. In fact the chief agents for the complete destruction of Kerala Buddhism were the militant Saivites. When we discussed the Buddhist vestiges of Kerala we referred to the fact that in all the temples where we find ancient Buddhist images the worshipping deities are 'Bhagavatis.' At Bharanikkavu, Kiliroor, Nilamperoor, Karumadi and other places we find the 'Bhagavati' as the chief deity while the Buddha image is thrown into an insignificant place. The Bhagavati is the most popular Saiva deity in Kerala. In fact the vast majority of the temples of Kerala are dedicated to deities of the Saivite pantheon. All the

Bhagavati shrines where we find Buddha images either housed in small sheds or thrown outside the temple compounds must have been originally places of Buddhistic worship.

The Saiva Nayanars throughout the Tamil country were carrying on a terrible crusade against the Buddhists and the Jains. Saint Appar one of the 'trinities' of Saivism, refers to the 'Samanars' (Jains) and the 'Bauddhas' very contemptuously in his works. Tirugnana Sambandar—the greatest of the Thevaram Trio—was a more active opponent of Buddhism than Appar. He made pilgrimages to different Saiva shrines in South India singing hymns in praise of Siva and holding disputations with the Buddhists wherever he found them. His one object in life seems to have been the putting down of 'heretical faiths' such as Jainism and Buddhism and with huge crowds of devotees and worshippers he constantly toured the Tamil land creating unbounded enthusiasm among the people for the cause of the Saiva religion. We have a graphic description of Sambandar's disputation with the Buddhists at Bodhimangai in Sekkilar's *Periyapuranam*. Bodhimangai was one of the strongest Buddhist settlements in the Tamil country. There was a Buddhist vihara there with many learned theras and a number of ordinary monks; the head of the Buddhist settlement was Buddha Nandi. Sekkilar describes the triumphant entry of the Saivites into Bodhimangai 'sounding their conches and brass trumpets and many other musical instruments and raising a din like unto a surging sea.' When Buddha Nandi forbade the blowing of the trumpets one of the followers of Sambandar cursed that thunderbolt should fall with a roar and knock the head of the Buddha off.

"Like the omnipotent mantra which like a thunderbolt destroys all obstacles to the spread of the commandments enjoined for those of the faith of the Lord of the full-banner, these words uttered by that holy truthful servant of the Lord sundered and blew into fragments the head and trunk of the Buddhist who came seeking victory in word disputation. Thereat the gathering of the Buddhists was thrown into utter confusion and being thoroughly frightened it led precipitately."[1]

There are numerous instances like this where the Saiva saints are said to have overcome their Buddhist opponents by deadly curses and spells. A good parallel is the story of Manikkavasagar striking dumb the Buddhists who took part in a disputation with him at Chidambaram.[2] In all these cases, we find the Buddhists completely helpless and overawed. Also we have ample instances of Saivites winning over the Buddhists to their

---

1. For the translation of Sekkilar's accounts Vide B. C. Law Volume Part I. PP. 41—49.

Sekkilar's accounts says that the curse against Buddha—Nandi was uttered by one of the devotees of Sambandar. But in the accounts of Namb Andar Nambi, Sambandar himself gives the curse which caused the death of Buddha Nandi.

2. "When Vadavurar (Manikka vasagar) was spending his time in Chidambaram, a certain Saiva devotee happened to go to Ceylon and mentioned Ponnambalam, literally golden hall of Chidambaram, whenever he met the Buddhists. The latter reported this to their King and the Saiva was asked to present himself before His Majesty. The Saiva spoke to him of Manikkavasagar having his camp at Chidambaram who would meet him in every point raised. The Buddhist king of Ceylon with his chief priest set out for Chidambaram. A great conference was held when the 'Tillai' three thousand persons were present. Question after question was put, but Vadavurar did not get dismayed. He was quite equal to the occasion. Enkindled by the lamp of burning faith the Buddhists would neither yield nor accept defeat. Then the saint resorted to a miracle by which he struck dumb the chief Buddhists who took part in the disputation, to the great wonderment of the Buddhist king." Buddhistic studies. PP. 690—691.

faith at the conclusion of heated religious disputations. For example, at the conclusion of the 'Veda' at Bodhimangai all the Buddhists accept Saivism and at Chidambaram the king, his daughter and all his followers become Saivites. Thus throughout South India the saivites were vigorously propagating their faith and promptly replacing the Buddhists.

The Vaishnavites also played an important part in destroying the influence of Buddhism. Among the Vaishnava Alvars who carried on an active propaganda against the Buddhists the most important were Tirumilisai, Tondaradippodigal, Tirumangai Alvar and Nammalvar. Tirumilsai refers to the Jains as 'ignorant jains' ('Ariyar Samanar') and to the Buddhists as 'spiritless Buddhists' ('Ayarttar Bavattar') Tondaradippodigal (8th century A. D.) was more militant in his attitude to the Jains and the Buddhists. He says "The learned well versed in sacred vedic lore would neither see the contemptible Buddhists and Samanas nor listen to their heretical teachings. Again, he prays :— "O lord of Sriranga, our ears have become diseased by listening to the senes of unceasing and unbearable slander of the socalled preachings of the Samana ignoramuses and the unprincipled Sakyas. If you would only endow me with sufficient strenght, I shall deem it my duty to do nothing short of chopping off their heads." These statements sufficiently reveal the spirit of the age. Tirumangai Alvar is said to have robbed away golden images from Buddha temples for meeting the expenses for improving the buildings in the Srirangam temple! Nammalvar expresses great sorrow at the ignorance of the Buddhists and Jains and 'regrets the waste of time and energy expended unnecessarily by people professing different creeds like the Samanas and the Buddhists for nothing.'

The activities of Kumarila[1] and Sankara were responsible to a great extent in destroying the influence of Buddhism in the South. Kumarila established the doctrine of the infallibility of the vedas and the necessity of conforming to their 'vidhis' or injunctions. Kumarila's name is included in many traditional accounts of Kerala and this clearly shows that Kerala was one of the centres of his activities.

The Namboothiri brahmins were the chief defenders of the vedic faith and the chief opponents of the Buddhists in Kerala. Sankara's teachings had profound and far-reaching influences in Kerala. The Namboodiries constituted themselves into a militant band for eastablishing the supremacy of the vedic faith and carried on a vigorous persecution of the Bauddhas. It was during this period that the word "Bauddha" became a synonym for a contemptible man. The viharas of the Buddhists were converted into Hindu temples and the imgaes of the Buddha were removed from all the prominent places. Social ostracism was the chief weapon which the Namboodiries used for destroying the influence of Buddhism. The Bauddhas were not allowed to enter Hindu houses and temples and to participate in the social functions. They could not bathe in the public tanks or even touch the wells of the Hindus. The disabilities imposed on the Bauddhas were so great that they were compelled to

---

1. Some scholars say that Kumarila Batta belonged to Assam while some say he was a South Indian. Mr. C. V. Vaidya places him in the Madhyadesa. The consensus of scholarly opinion seems to be in favour of the view that he belonged to South India. It is said that Kumarila learnt Buddhism from Buddhist teachers by pretending to be a Buddhist and that when he became old he burnt himself to death to atone for his sin of 'gurudroha.'

change their religion. Of course, Buddhism at this time was not strong to face any organised opposition. There is a popular saying in Malayalam which states that it is better to court death than live as a votary of the Buddha. This saying is an eloquent commentary on the pitiable position of the Buddhists in this period.

The political conditions in Kerala in this period were also favourable for an anti-Buddhistic policy. Buddhism thrived in Kerala during the palmy days of the great Perumals. But by the 9th century A.D. the rule of the Perumals had come to a close. The feudatory princes and chieftains of Malabar became independent in their respective principalities. The Perumals had always extended toleration to Buddhism. But now Buddhism had to face the hostility of the vedic religion unaided by imperial patronage. There was no scope for religious toleration in the disturbed political and social atmosphere which prevailed in Kerala at that time.

We have described religious persecution as the chief cause for the decline of Buddhism in Kerala. But it must be emphasised that Buddhism succumbed to the hostility of the vedic religion because it was already in a decadent position. Brahminism had borrowed the popular features of Buddhism like image worship, festivals, processions etc and had also incorporated many of its doctrines. Buddhism became almost like a squeezed orange and it could no longer command the loyalty of its adherents.

CHAPTER XII.

POLITICAL CONDITIONS OF ANCIENT KERALA.

GENERALLY we use the word Kerala to refer to the whole region on the west coast extending from Gokarnam in the north to Cape Comorin in the south. Modern Kerala consists of the Indian district of Malabar and the two native states of Cochin and Travancore. Generally the name Kerala is applied to refer to the Malayalam-speeking regions of the south. Even though in South Travancore, the main language spoken is Tamil, Kerala is considered to be extending to these regions also.

It is difficult to fix the exact geographical extent of ancient Kerala, because in ancient times there were frequent conquests and annexations and consequently frequent unsettlement of boundaries. The *Keralolpathi* treats Kerala as one geographical unit extending from Gokarnam to Cape Comorin. But the *Keralolpathi* itself refers to various divisions of the country at different periods of its history. The main geographical units mentioned in the *Keralolpathi* are the Tulu Kingdom, the Kupa Kingdom, the Kerala Kingdom and the Mushika Kingdom. The *Keralolpathi* mentions the divisions of the country on two occasions, once by the Brahmins during their direct sway and another time by one of the Perumals. According to the first division the Tulu kingdom extended from Gokarnam to Perumpula (i. e., the modern districts of Canara), the Kupa Kingdom extended from Perupula to Puthupattanam (i.e. the modern district of North Malabar), the Kerala kingdom extended from Puthupattanam to Kannetti (*i. e.*

South Malabar, the Cochin state and North Travancore) and the Mushika kingdom extended from Kannetti to Cape Comorin (i. e. South Travancore). According to the second division the Tulu kingdom extended from Gokarnam to Perumpula, the Kerala kingdom from Perumpula to Puthupattanam, the Mushika kingdom from Puthupattanam to Kannetti and the Kupa kingdom from Kannetti to Cape Comorin.[1] It is interesting to note that in some other versions of the *Keralolpathi* we come across a different account of the division. For e. g, in one version, the Mushika kingdom is described as extending from Perumpula to Puthupattanam.[2] All that we conclude from these various accounts of the *Keralolpathi* is that in ancient times there were four recognised geographical units in Kerala and their boundaries were Gokarnam, Perumpula, Puthupattanam, Kannetti and Cape Comorin. We cannot say that the whole region from Gokarnam to Cape Comorin was under the direct rule of one king at any period in the history of our study. Even during the hey-day of Chera power the whole of this region would not have been under their direct sway. The name Kerala however is applied to refer to the entire region.

Kerala is known by different names—Kerala—Chera—Malabar—Malayalam—Malanadu—etc. from earliest times the country is referred to as Kerala in Sanskrit literature. The *Mahabarata*, the *Ramayana*, the *Vayu Purana*, the *Matsya Purana* and the *Markandeya Purana* make mention of Kerala. As we have already referred to the Asokan edicts make mention of Keralaputra.

---

1. Sri Vanchi Sethu Lakshi Series No. 18. *Keralacharitam*, p. 18.

2. *See* our Chapter entitled "Srimula Vasam," a famous Buddhist centre of ancient Kerala.

Since Pliny, the Periplus and Ptolemy refer to the country using words resembling Kerala, it seems clear that in the early centuries of the Christian era Kerala was a populr name applied to this country. Varahamihira the famous astronomer of the 6th century A.D. refers to the country as Kerala in his *Brahatsamhita.* In an inscription of the Western Chalukya king, Pulakesi I, mention is made of Kerala. In the Mahakuta inscription of Mangalesa, Kerala is mentioned along with the other southern Kingdoms. In many other inscriptions and copper plate inscriptions of the Western Chalukya dynasty we find references to the country of Kerala. The name Kerala came to be applied to the country only after the advent of the Aryans. The indigenous name is Chera and it is by this name that the country is referred to in the various Tamil classics. Kerala may be taken to be the Aryanised from of the Dravidam Chera Dr. Gundhert, Rev. Foulkes and other scholars point out that Keralam is the Canarese dialectical form of the word Chera. Some scholars contend that Keralam is derived from Keram or the cocoanut palm which grows abundantly in the country. But it is more reasonable to argue that Keram is derived from Keralam which is itself derived from Cheram.

The name Malabar seems to have come into vogue only in the later centuries of the Christian era with the advent of the Arabs. We do not come across this name either in the Tamil or the Sanskrit literature. The foreign travellers and writers use this name to refer to the whole of the Malayalam—speaking region, but now it is used mainly to refer to the Indian district of that name. The first part of the name (Mala) is the Malayalam word for hill. The affix 'bar' seems to have come into use with the advent of the Arab travellers. Colonel Yule gives the

following Arabian forms—*Malibar*, *Manibar*, *Mulibar* *Munibar*, and the following as the forms used by early European travellers—*Minibar*, *Milibar*, *Melibar*, *Minubar*, *Melbaria*.[1] The affix 'bar' has been explained by Lassen as identical with the sanskrit '*vara*' or region. Thus Malabar may be said to be derived from *Malaya vara* or *malavaram*. But Caldwell does not agree with the interpretation as he says, there is no trace of either *Malaya vara* or *Malavaram* having ever been used by the Indian people. Dr. Gundhert suggests the possibility of the derivation of 'bar' from the Arabic 'barr' which means continent. Colonel Yule thinks that the affix bar is the Persian 'bar' and not the Arabic "barr" and Caldwell agrees with him in this interpretation.

Malayalam, though generally used to denote the language of the country, is also used to refer to the country. The first part of it is the Dravidian 'Mala' which means hill, while the second part 'alam' has been interpreted by some as depth and by others as referring to waves (ala). According to the former interpretation Malayalam would mean a country of hills and depths while according to the latter it would mean a country of hills and waves. But Dr. Caldwell says that "alam is a verbal derivative from the root al., (to possess, to use, to rule) and that it should not be interpreted to mean depth.[2]

The *Keralolpathi* generally refers to the country as Malanadu or the "hill country." But this name does not seem to have been very popular in ancient Kerala.

The early history of Kerala may be roughly divided into three periods. (1) the period of the early Cheras (2) the period of the protectors (3) the period of the Perumals.

---

1. Quoted in the Introduction to the comparative Grammar of Dravadian languages, Caldwell. P. 23.

2. Ibid. P. 15.

We know practically very little about the rule of the early Cheras who are described in Kerala traditions as the 'Adi Cheras.' It is generally believed that Mahabali the legendary Chakravarthi of Kerala was the leading king of this dynasty. Mahabali's reign marks the climax of the glory of the early Cheras of Kerala and with him the dynasty declined. The Brahmin immigration into Kerala must have taken place during this period. Mahabali is described in the Puranas as a Rakshasa king of great might who subdued the whole of the underworld– 'Pathala lokam' or 'Naga lokam.' The puranas describe the subjugation of Mahabali by Vishnu who appeared as 'Vamana.' During the Brahmin colonisation of Kerala the country must have been occupied by a set of people commonly referred to as 'Nagas' or serpents. It is significant that Mahabali's kingdom is referred to in the Puranas as 'Nagalokam.'

The Brahmins steadily acquired for themselves an important position in political and social life. They introduced the vedic religion into the country which soon became very popular. Their privileged position as priests acting as intermediaries between the people and their Gods enabled them to gain a powerful hold over every phase of the people's activities. They championed the cause of popular rights and privileges as against monarchical despotism and this enhanced their popularity. Soon the people overthrew the Adichera dynasty and set up an oligarchical government consisting of a few elected representatives. This period is described in Kerala history and traditions as the rule of the 'Taliatiries' or 'Raksha purushanmar' or Protectors. It was during this period that Buddhism was first introduced into Kerala. This grand experiment in republican government was resorted to after deep delibrations in the National

Assembly. Five protectors were elected by the people to be in charge of the administration of the state; one of them was the chief protector. The tenure of office for the chief protector was to be twelve years, while that for the other protectors was to be three years. From the *Keralolpathi* we understand that these protectors were elected by an assembly of all the leading citizens of Kerala. The protectors had to take very stern oaths that they would resign after their prescribed tenure of three years and that they would rather commit suicide than violate the cherished traditions of the country. But the rule of the Raksha purushanmar became unpopular in course of time as they began to assume arbitrary powers for themselves. The system of rule by protectors was set up mainly because the people were averse to monarchical despotism, but now the protectors became more high-handed and despotic than kings. Further, the *Keralolpathi* tells us, that the protectors became chiefly interested in promoting their selfish interests and began to misuse their power for amassing money. The protectors knew that they had to surrender their office after three years and so they wanted to make the best use of these three years for their selfish ends. The 'Kuttams' laid down some rules preventing the protectors from amassing wealth but they were not very effective. Further these periodical elections led to serious disputes among the people. Finally the 'Pramanies' of the country decided to reform this system of administration. They wanted to abolish the practice of electing four people for a period of twelve years. But the *Keralolpathi* says that all attempts to introduce this reform were frustrated by the unscrupulous protectors who wanted to usurp power for themselves. This led to bitter quarrels among various factions

and the protectors who were elected for three years even refused to resign after their periods had elapsed. This turned the people against the protectors and the people decided to completely abolish the system of government by Raksha purushanmar. The *Keralolpathi* says that a meeting of the people of Kerala was convened at Tirunavaye where it was unanimously resolved to invite a Perumal from outside to rule over the country for a period of twelve years. Thus the system of the "protectorate government" was over thrown and the rule of the Perumals commenced in Kerala.

Even though the early Perumals were very powerful rulers, the administration of Kerala was by no means tyrannical or despotic. They showed great sympathy for the traditions of self-government in Kerala and never acted against the established conventions of administration. It would be entirely wrong to say, as some authors do, that the Perumals built up a system of centralised despotism. Monarchical absolutism was entirely alien to Kerala till the commencement of the modern period marked by the rise of Raja Marthanda Varma of Travancore. The Perumals of Kerala—though strong rulers they were—never attempted to violate the cherished traditions of popular government.

The Perumals did not completely abolish the system of government by the protectors. The protectors or Taliatiries were allowed to continue in their offices without any administrative powers. The Perumals deprived the Taliatiries of their title of Raksha Purushanmar, but continued the practice of electing four Taliatiries for periods of three years. These Taliatiries were consulted by the Perumals along with the

other popular representatives in the various Raja sabhas. They had their headquarters very near the royal capital and were known as '*Mel Tali*,' '*Kil Tali*' '*Chengapurat Tali*' and '*Netiya Tali*'.[1] These Talies represented the four divisions into which the country was divided for administrative purposes.

For purposes of administration the entire country had been divided into four '*Kalakams*,' the headquarters of each of which was a temple of fame. The *Keralolpathi* says that these *Kalakams*, were located at (1) *Perinchellur* (2) *Payyannur* (3) *Parappur* and (4) *Chenganyur*. According to one version of the *Keralolpathi* these *Kalakams* were called after the four castes; *Penchellur* was the '*Brahman Kalakam*,' *Payyannur* the '*Kshatriya Kalakam*,' *Parappur* the '*Vaisya Kalakam*' and *Chenganyur* the '*Sudra Kalakam*'. Each *Kalakam* was divided into 'gramas'. The *Keralolpathi* says that there were sixty four 'gramas' in Kerala. For military purposes the land was divided into 'Nadus' presided over by a 'Naduvalis' and 'Desams' presided over by 'Desa valis'. Each Desam was again subdivided into 'Taras' and these Taras formed the units of civil administration. There were assemblies for the Tara for the Nadu and for the country as a whole called by the name 'Kuttams.' There were three Kuttams—the village Kuttam, the district Kuttam and the Kuttam of all Kerala.

The Tara or village Kuttam was presided over by the village elders called the 'Karanavars' or the

---

1. There were also minor Talies whose location may still be traced to those places which continue to have the affix 'Tali' added to their proper names. For *eg.*, Calicut Tali, Changanat Tali, Kottai Tali, Kunnat Tali Nileswaram Tali.

The S.C.P. makes mention of four chief Talies whose representatives are called by the Perumal to witness the execution of the deed. H. of K. Vol. I. P. 310.

'Pramanies.' All the affairs of the village were discussed and settled in the village Kuttam. Petty offences which did not require the intervention of the superior authorities, were placed before the Kuttam and disposed of according to the votes of the majority. The Kuttam looked after all the requirements of the village temple, like the repairs to the temple, the conduct of temple utsavams, etc. The villagers used to collect the funds necessary for temple expenses. Funds used to be collected for digging up pools and providing other such amenities to the villagers. The village Pramanies were respected by all and their orders scrupulously obeyed. The Pramani was usually the eldest male member of the most influential family in the Tara. "Any respectable man in the village who was considered as more intelligent than his neighbours and who was on that account resorted to by the inhabitants for the adjustment of their little differences also gradually acquired among them the title of Pramani. If a village had no Pramani of its own the inhabitants used to carry their complaints to the Pramani of the neighbouring village. Social ostracism was the powerful weapon in the hands of the Pramanies for enforcing their decisions. The hardships of an ostracised person were so great that people dreaded this more than even capital punishment. One expelled from society was little better than an outlaw. "Like Ishmail of old his hands were against all and the hands of all were against him. Every one shunned him. He could not attend the village temple or bathe in the temple tank; no barber would shave him, no washerman would wash for him. He became a social leper and a political non-entity. The ban followed him wherever he went and he was treated in the same manner everywhere".[1]

1, H.of K. Vol. I, pp. 260-261.

These village republics exercised a great influence on the community socially and politically. The members of the village had a feeling of corporate unity and a passionate love for local independence. Any one who acted against the interests of the village immediately became a social enemy. It was the earnest endeavour of the villagers to make their villages as self-sufficient as possible. They had their own temple, their own pasture land, their own artisans, their own washermen, barbers and men of other occupations, in short all, that was necessary to make life happy and comfortable.[1]

The Kuttams of the Nadu discussed matters which were of general importance to all the villages of the Nadu. "The Nadu or country" says Mr. Logan "was a congeries of Taras or village republics and the Kuttam or assembly of the Nadu was a representative body of immense power which when necessity existed, set at naught the authority of the Raja and punished his ministers when they did unwarrantable acts."

The Kuttam of all Kerala met for the discussion of affairs of national concern. This was the grand parliament of the nation where grave questions like the change of government, succession of kings, etc., were discussed and decided upon. This assembly usually met only once in 12 years. The *Keralolpathi* says that these national assemblies used to meet at Tirunavaye on the banks of the Ponnani river.[2]

---

1. H. of K. Vol. I, p. 259.

2. These national assemblies continued to be a regular features of Kerala administration as late as the 18th century. We find a reference to this national assembly in the letters of Visscher the Dutch Chaptain at Cochin in the 18th century. He speaks of "the great national assembly of the Malabars collected in the open air to deliberate on the affairs of the state" in 1720. *Vide* Vicher's letter No. 3.

These Kuttams are an eloquent testimony to the great zeal which the people evinced in self-government. The people were intolerant of despotism of any kind. Their 'Kuttams' were zealous guardians of popular rights and privileges and served as effective checks on the personal ambition of their rulers.

Side by side with these Kuttams there were popular organisations called 'the Five Hundred' 'the Six Hundred' 'the Five Thousand', etc. Probably these names represent the number of the members of these organisations. Like the Kuttams, they were designed to act as checks on the despotic power of the kings. 'The Six hundred' is mentioned in the S. C. P. as giving sanction to the deed. The inscription says: "With the sanction of the palace, Major Vyaraka Devar who has given to these (the Palliyar) the 72 Jenmi rights (Vidupem) such as for marriages (or processions) the elephant's back, the earth, the water, etc. and with the concurrence of His Excellency the Ayyan Adigal, His Excellency Rama, the ministers and officers, the 'Six hundred'............carry out this unrestricted possession right in the manner described by this copper deed for the time that earth, moon and sun exist." Again in the Tirunelli copper plate we read, "This is placed under (the control of) the Five Hundred and Five Thousand of Puraigila-nadu."[1] There are numerous other inscriptions of later dates making mention of these popular organisations. We have not yet come across inscriptions of the early centuries of the Christian era which refer to organizations like these. The two inscriptions which we have mentioned above (belonging to the 8th and the 9th

1. H. of K. Vol I, pp. 252-253.

centuries A.D.) are sufficient evidences to prove the great importance which the early rulers of Kerala attached to popular institution.

The Perumals carried on the administration of the country with the assistance of the 'Pancha Mahasabhas' which were believed to have been established by the first Perumal himself. These Mahasabhas were (1) 'Vaidika Sabha' or religious council (2) 'Jyothisha sabha' or astrological council (3) 'Vydya sabha' or medical council (4) 'Mantri sabha' or council of Ministers, and (5) 'Mahajana sabha' or council of the people. The Vaidika sabha discussed and decided all matters concerning religion. Religious penalties could be awarded only by this council. The kings used to consult this council for the institution of new images in temples, construction of religious institutions and other such matters. Members of this council were—well versed in Sastras and vedas and often they would be deputed by the kings for debates with the learned scholars of other religions. When Buddhism became very popular in Kerala many eminent Buddhists were living in the capital under the patronage of the kings and taking part in these discussions. The king used to consult his astrological council for fixing auspicious dates for expeditions to neighbouring countries, for royal marriages and other such important events. The medical council looked after the medical needs of the people and the members of the royal family. The council of ministers helped the king in the day to day administration of the country. The Mahajana Sabha discussed important matters concerning the people as a whole; it consisted of representatives from the various 'Kuttams.' The *Silappadhikaram* makes a clear reference to the "five great assemblies" of Chenguttavan's

court.[1] Reference is also made to the " eight great groups ", probably this refers to the eight important officials of the court.[2] The queen also used to attend the councils of the court. We have the instance of Ilango venmal, Chenguttavan's queen, taking part in the discussion in the council chamber when the question of erecting the Pattini temple was decided.[3] Infact the idea of honouring the Goddess of chastity was suggested by the queen herself in the council.

There was a separate department of finance under the control of a body of officials called 'Ayakkanakkar'. We find Chenguttavan ordering the 'Ayakkanakkar' to remit all taxes due from the citizens to commemorate the founding of the temple of Kannaki.[4] The chief item of expenditure was connected with the civil and military establishments. The Chera kings used to maintain big armies consisting of chariots, elephants, cavalry and infantry. Chenguttavan is described to have taken for his northern expedition " one hundred and two actresses, two hundred and eight accompanying singers, one hundred jesters, one hundred lofty chariots, five hundred spirited elephants, ten thousand steeds with trimmed

---

1. " Jewelled lamps dispelled the darkness of the night; and (lifting up) their ranks of closely flying banners, the striking force, the five great assemblies and the eight great groups, the Purohita in the service of the king, rich in fierce horses and elephants, financiers, upholders of Dharma, and executive officers all spoke with one voice : " Long live the ruler of the whole earth " *Silappadikaram* Canto XXVI, ll, 32-42.

2. The eight chief officials were the superintendent of accounts, the head of the executive, the officer of the treasury, the chamberlain, the representatives of the citizens, the commander, the chief of the elephant warriors and of the horse warriors. Introduction to the *Silappadikaram* V. R. R. Dikshitar, pp. 36-37.

3. *Silappadikaram* Canto. XXV. ll, 107—114.

4. *Silappadikaram* Canto, XXVIII, ll. 204—206.

manes, twenty thousand carts laden with different kinds of merchandise and a thousand Kanjukas."[1]

The capital of ancient Kerala is described as Vanji in the *Silappadikaram*, the *Manimekalai* and other Tamil classics. Pliny describes 'Muziris' as the capital of the country while Ptolemy refers to it as 'Karoura.' There has been much controversy about the identification of the Chera capital. The 'Karoura' of Ptolemy has been identified with Karur in the Trichinapoly District by some scholars and with 'Thrikkakkara' or 'Thrikkarurk-kara' (a place six miles from Ernakulam in the Cochin state by some others. It has also been identified with 'Thrikkarur' near Kothamangalam in North Travancore by some scholars. Thus there are numerous places in and outside Kerala claiming to have been the capital of the ancient Cheras. The chief controversy seems to be over the question whether the Chera capital was within the modern Kerala territory or outside it. It is unnecessary now to deal at length about the identification of the Chera capital, as it is one of the much discussed topics in South Indian history. Dr. Krishnaswamy Iyengar has dealt with this topic in a very masterly way in his 'Seran Vanji' and the learned professor's conclusions have gained acceptance at the hands of the majority of modern scholars. After a thorough examination of all the historical facts he comes to the conclusion that Tiruvanjik-kalam lying adjacent to Cranganore was the capital of the ancient Chera kings. This identification is the most satisfactory as it reconciles all the statements of the early travellers and the various accounts of the Tamil classics.

From the different accounts of the Chera capital found in ancient Tamil literature we gather that it was

1. Ibid Canto, XXVII. ll, 128—140.

one of the most flourishing cities of South India. Both the *Silappadikaram* and the *Manimekalai* describe Vanji as a very prosperous city, the centre of great religious, social and political activities. We get valuable accounts about the ancient Chera capital from the writings of the foreign travellers of the early centuries of the Christian era. Pliny[1] (75 A. D.) says: "If the wind called Hippalus be blowing, Muziris the nearest mart of India can be reached in forty days. It is not a desirable place of call, pirates being in the neighbourhood who occupy a place called Nitrias, and besides, it is not well supplied with wares for traffic. Ships beside anchor at a graet distance from the shore and the cargoes have to be landed and shipped by employing boats." The difficulties which Pliny points out are not mentioned by the author of the Periplus. The latter says "Tyndis is of the kingdom of Cerabothra; it is a village in plain sight by the sea. Muziris of the same kingdom abounds in ships sent there with cargoes from Arabia and by the Greeks; it is located on a river distant from Tyndis by river and sea five hundred stadia and up the river from the shore twenty stadia." This 'Muziris' of the western travellers is the same as the 'Muyrikkodu' of the S.C.P. and the 'Muchiri' of the early Tamil poets. It was also known as 'Makotai' (Refer the S.C.P. of Bhaskara Ravivarman) or Makotai Pattanam. Mahadevar Pattanam is the sanskritised form of Makotai Pattanam.

Cranganore was the principal sea port of the west and the centre of a lively trade with foreign countries. The Periplus says that it was visited by ships from Arabia and Greece. A Tamil poet describes Muchiri (Muziris

---

1. Foreign notices of South India by K. A. N. Sastri. p. 53.

or Cranganore) as follows:—[1] "The thriving town of Muchiri where the beautiful large ships of the Yavanas bringing gold come splashing the white foam on the waters of the Periyar which belongs to the Cherala and return laden with pepper." Here 'Yavanas' refers to the Greeks and 'Periyar' to the great river of that name in North Travancore. "Fish is bartered for paddy", says another poet, "sacks of pepper are brought from the houses to the market." The gold received from ships in exchange for articles sold is brought on shore in barges at Muchiri, where the music of the surging sea never ceases and where Kuddavan[2] presents to visitors the rare products of the seas and mountain." From these accounts, we gather that gold was the principal import and pepper the principal export. The Periplus gives the following account about the exports and imports of Kerala. "They send large ships to these market towns on account of the great quantity and bulk of pepper and Malabathrum. There are imported here in the first place a great quantity of coin, topaz, thin clothing, not much; figured linens, antimony, coral, crude glass, copper, tin, lead, wine, not much, but as much as at Banygaza, realzar and orpiment, and wheat enough for the sailors for this is not dealt in by the merchants there. There is exported pepper which is produced in quantity in only one region near these markets, a district called Cottonara. Besides this there are exported great quantities of fine pearls, ivory, silk cloth, malabathrum from the places in the interior, transparent stones of all kinds."

---

1. Quoted in the H. of K. Vol. I. P. 307.

2. The Cera king was known generally as Kudavarkoman or the lord of the western region. His other titles were Kuttuvan, Konga, Puliyan, Poraiyan, etc.

The chief imports into Kerala were gold, copper, tin, lead, glass, corn and cloth and the chief exports were pepper, cardamoms and diamonds.

Pliny makes mention of "Nacyndon which is called Becare" and "Cottanara" as two important towns in the west coast beyond the jurisdiction of "Caelobothras" sovereign of Muziris. These two are described as the possession of the Pandiyan king. Pliny says: "Another more convenient harbour of the nation is Nacyndon which is called Becare. There Pandiyan used to reign dwelling at a great distance from the mart in a town in the interior of the country called Modura. The distrtct from which pepper is carried down to Becare in canoes is called Cottonara. The author of the Periplus also makes mention of these towns as under the jurisdiction of the Pandyan king. He says "Nelcyinda is distant from Muziris by river and sea about 500 stadia and is of another kingdom the Pandian. This place also is situated on a river, but 120 stadia from the sea. There is another place at the mouth of this river the village of Bacare, to which ships drop down on the outward voyage from Nelcynda and anchor in the road stead to take on their cargoes, because the river is full of shoals and the channels are not clear. The kings of both these market towns live in the interior." There is a notable difference between the two accounts. Pliny speaks of 'Becare' as another name for 'Nelcynda' while the author of the Periplus speaks of 'Becare' and 'Nelcynda' as two different places. But both agree that these places were under the Pandyan king. Scholars are not unanimous in the identification of these places. The Periplus has clearly stated that 'Nelcynda' was 500 stadia from 'Muziris,' but many scholars seem to have overlooked this statement.

It would be reasonable to conclude that it was a place somewhere near Kottayam. It is described to be a place situated on a river 120 stadia from the sea. This river may be the Meenachil Aru of Kottayam. 'Becare' is identified with 'Porakkad' by Prof. K. A. N. Sastri.[1] Some scholars have identified it with 'Vaikara' a place near Kottayam.[2] Some others have identified it with "Thevalakkara" a place near Quilon. But Prof. Sastri's identification is more acceptable than the others. 'Becare' is described to be a place "to which ships drop down on the outward voyage from Nelcynda." Poracad is a port situated about ten miles south of Alleppey and in ancient times it had all facilities for the safe anchorage of ships of all sizes. Neither 'Vaikaran' or 'Thevalakkara' has any of these conveniences. The statement of Pliny and of the author of the Periplus that these places belonged to the Pandyan kings is perplexing. Probably these places had been subjugated by some Pandyan ruler in the 1st century A.D. or this must have been ruled by a scion of the Pandyan family who was a 'samanta' of the Chera ruler. The "Punjattil" royal house of Kottayam is one of the oldest ruling houses of the west coast. There are evidences to show that it existed even in the time of the Perumals. The "Punjattil Rajas" were scions of the Pandyan Royal family, but had recognised the jurisdiction of the Chera rulers in their territories. The reference to "Nelcynda and Bacare" as being under the Pandyan king can be interpreted as a reference to the jurisdiction of the 'Punjattil rulers' over these places. The 'Cottanara' mentioned by Pliny and the author of the Periplus has

---

1. Foreign notices of South India, P. 57, Foot Note 32.
2. "*Kerala Charitam*" P. 118.

been identified with Kottarakkara in central Travancore by some scholars. According to Dr. Burnell, 'Cottanara' is "Kolathunadu, the district about Tellicherry, the pepper district." Both Pliny and the author of the Periplus refer to the plentiful supply of pepper from Cottanara. Dr. Burnell is inclined to think that Cotanara is Kolathunadu because of the luxurious growth of pepper there.

Another important town of ancient Kerala was 'Tyndis.' The Periplus says that it was a village "in plain sight by the sea." It is described to be 500 stadia distant from Muziris. Dr. Burnell has identified Tyindis with Kadalundi near Beypore. This place satisfies the condition of being 500 stadia distant from Cranganore.

Apart from 'Muziris', 'Nelcynda', 'Bacare' and 'Tyndis', we find references to many places in south Kerala in the Periplus. The Periplus says: "Beyond Bacare there is the Dark Mountain and another district stretching along the coast toward the south called Paralia. The first place is called Balita; it has a fine harbour and a village by the shore. Beyond this there is another place called Comari at which are the cape of Comari and a harbour; hither come those men who wish to consecrate themselves for the rest of their lives and bathe and dwell in celibacy and women also do the same." 'Paralia' is identified "as the coast line below the Travancore back waters around Cape comorin and as far as Adams bridge."[1] 'Balita' has been identified with 'Varkkalai' a place near Quilon.[2] Comari is of course Cape Comorin, the land end of Kerala and India. Cape Comorin is

1 Foreign notices of South India, p. 59.

2. Ibid, Foot note No. 37.

mentioned in the *Manimekalai*; strangely enough, both the anthors of the *Manimekalai* and the Periplus refer to the importance of this place for holy baths.[1] Whether these places in the south actually belonged to the Perumals or not, is a disputed question. Some scholars are of opinion that in the early years of the Christian era the *Regio Pandionis* of which Madura was the capital comprehended the greater part of the southern portion of the Coromandel coast and extended across the Peninsula westward to Malabar.[2] The southern regions of Kerala must have been frequently invaded by the Pandyan rulers and the western travellers must have mistaken these to be Pandyan territories. But these territories came under the complete control of the Pandyas and the Cholas only after the decline of the Perumal dynasty. The travellers of the medieval period considered the regions between Quilon and Cape Comorin as outside the boundary of Malabar. For example, Al Biruni (A.D. 970-1039) says that 'Melibar' extended from "Karoha to Kaulam" (Quilon). Al Idrisi (A.D. 1153) says that 'Manibar' extended from "Honore to Kwalam." Even though the southern regions of Kerala came under foreign influence in the medieval period, Kerala appears in ancient traditions and history as one geographical entity. As we have already pointed out the authority of the early Perumals was recognised all over Kerala even though only the regions between "Puthupattanam and Kannetti" were under their direct rule.

---

1. The *Manimekalai* says: "There lived in Varanasi a Brahman teaching the veda known by the name of Abhanjika with his wife Sali. Having fallen away from conduct expected of her high station she wished to get rid of her sin by bathing in the sea at Kumari (Cape Comorin)".
The *Manimekalai*-Book XIII.

2. H. of K. Vol. I, p. 10.

APPENDIX I

RULERS OF ANCIENT KERALA AND THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS AS DESCRIBED IN THE TAMIL CLASSICS

Udiyan Cheralatan.—He may be regarded as the founder of the Chera dynasty of the Sangam period. He was famous for his lavish hospitality. He had the title of "Vanavaramban" or the one whose kingdom was bounded by the sky.

Imayavaramban Nedum Cheralatan.—He was a great warrior and in his time the chera kingdom was extended towards the north. He is described to have conquered seven kings and annexed their territories. His title "Imayavaramban" means that the boundaries of his kingdom extended up to the Himalayas. He is described to have won a victory over the Yavanas. He was reputed for his munificent gifts to temples.

Sel-Kelu Kuttavan.—He had his capital on the banks of the Periyar. He was a great conqueror in the early part of his reign, but later he turned away from the path of bloodshed and became a follower of the Brahmans. He was a great patron of letters.

Kalankai kanni Narmudi Cheral.—Though a great warrior he was noted for the kindness with which he treated his enemies. He is described as an ideal monarch who lived for the good of others. He also had the title of Vanavaramban.

Sen-Kuttavan.—He was the greatest of the Cheras.—He led a campaign to the Himalayas to set a stone from there to make an image of Pathini Devi. He defeated Nannan the chieftain of Velir and occupied his capital Viyalur. He overthrew a confederacy of Nine Cholas at Nerivayil. He scored a victory over the Kongar—[Gangas?] His Naval victories won for him the title of *Kadal pirakkottiya Vel Kelu Kuttavan.*

His reign probably marks the climax of Chera greatness. It was a period of great religious toleration and all round prosperity. Buddhism was very popular in Cheranadu during his reign.

Adu-kotpattu Cheralathan.—During his reign trade and commerce flourished in the country. He is said to have lavished his hospitality

even on people of other countries. He was a great patron of music, dancing and other fine arts.

Antuvan Cheral Irumporai.—Probably he belonged to a different line of Chera kings. We do not gather much information about him from the Tamil classics.

Selvak-kadumko Valiyatan.—He defeated the combined forces of the Cholas and the Pandyas. His period was one of plenty and prosperity. Kapilar the celebrated sangam poet flourished in his time. He was a great patron of learning and fine arts.

Perum Cheral Irumporai.—He was a great warrior who is said to have defeated many kings of the neighbouring dominions. He had able ministers and his reign was very popular. He performed many yagas and he was a great patron of learning. Kiranar the great poet lived in his court.

Ilam Cheral Irumporai.—He was noted for his munificence. The chief products of his country mentioned in the classics are sandal wood, agil, and sugar cane. He is described as the lord of Tondi, Kongar Nadu Kuttavar Nadu and Puli Nadu.

Kuttavan Kodai.—He does not seem to have been a great warrior, but he was a great patron of learning and himself a poet.

Cheraman Ilam Kuttavan.—He also seems to have been a poet. We do not gather any information from the classics about his achievements as a conqueror.

Palaipadiya Perum Kadumko.—He was a great patron of poets and himself a poet of great repute.

Cheraman Ma-venko.—He is described as a great friend of the Chola and Pandya kings.

Rulers of Ancient Kerala and their Achievements as described in the *Keralolpathi*.

Keya Perumal.—After the overthrow of the protectorate, the Brahmins assembled at Tirunavaye and decided to appoint a king to rule over Kerala. The choice fell on Keyaperumal of Keyapuram. He was installed as the first of the Perumals in the year 216 A.D. His main duty was to protect the people and maintain order in the country.

Chola Perumal.—He is described to have been brought from "Cholapuram." A palace was built for him known as Cholak-karai. Even though he was brought for a period of 12 years, he returned to Chola-mandala after ruling for 10 years and two months.

Pandy Perumal.—He was brought from "Pandy mandalam." He built a fort and ruled for nine years. He returned to "Pandymandalam" saying that there was none to protect his territories.

Bhutaraya Perumal.—There arose a bitter quarrel between him and the Brahmins. He was supposed to be guarded by two spirits and the brahmins induced one of them to assassinate him.

Kerala Perumal.—He ruled for the full span of twelve years.

Cholia Perumal.—He also ruled for the full period of twelve years.

Kulasekhara Perumal.—He also ruled for 12 years.

Bana Perumal.—It was during this period that that the Bauddhas came to preach their religion. They converted Bana Perumal to their faith. Bana after his conversion abdicated his throne and left his country.

Thulabhan Perumal.—He ruled in the northern regions between Gokarnam and Perumpula.

Indran Perumal.—He divided the country into four Kalakams and appointed Taliatires to rule over them.

Aryan Perumal.—He divided the country into four geographical regions, the first extending from Gokarnam to Perumpula called Tulu country, the second extending from Perumpula to Puthuppattanam called Kerala country, the third extending from Puthuppattanam to Kannetti called the Mushika country and the fourth extending from Kannetti to Cape Comorin called Kupa country.

Kundan Perumal.—He ruled for twelve years.

Kotty (Kutty?) Perumal.—The place he lived in came to be called Kott-ik-kollam. He ruled only for a year.

Madan Perumal.—He ruled for twelve years and on leaving the country appointed his brother Eli Perumal, as his successor.

Eli Perumal.—He ruled for twelve years and built a fort known as *Mataikotta.*

Kompan Perumal.—According to one version of the *Keralolpathi* he ruled only for three and a half years while according to another he ruled for twelve years.

Vijayan Perumal.—He also built a fort in his capital.

Valabhan Perumal.—He built many temples and fortresses.

Harischandran Perumal.—He also built a fort and some temples.

Mallan Perumal.—He built a fort in the Mushika country.

Kulasekhara Perumal.—He brought many Kshatrias into the country.

Cheraman Perumal.—He is described as the last and the greatest of the Perumals.

APPENDIX II

THE BUDDHISTIC INSCRIPTION OF KING VARAGUNA

"Om, be it well. He who is himself full of happiness, who manifests the condition of the *kalpaka* tree, from whom having risen, the sun of the right path dispels darkness, at whose feet seeking refuge, all kinds of living beings become happy,—may he, the son of Suddhodana, support all the three worlds like another Meru.

V. 2.—Averse to the assumption of the nature of the self, (unable to perceive their own form), bearing the forehead mark called the *apanga* as an adornment, (casting sportive side-glances), listening daily (to the Dharma) without satiety, (always and without cessation extending up to the ears), possessing knowledge of various kinds (perceiving multifarious forms), and victorious throughout the globe, (surpassing in beauty the blue lily), may the Dharma and the Sangha be, for a long time, like two eyes to the goddess Earth who is infested with the darkness of all bad religions.

V. 3.—Brilliant as if well washed and purified by the flood of the nectar of mercy flowing out, may the moon-like radiance of the Buddha long grant prosperity to us, his worshippers.

Vv. 4-6.—Which originated from the moon, pure (white) like a flood of moonlight gladdening the world, owing to whose origin the stain has left the moon and is somewhere, and in respect of whose conquest of the world, the mountains of sunset and sunrise, the Himalaya and the Malaya become pillars of victory, their slopes being cut into by the rows of chisel-like tusks of their army-elephants; for whom the oceans become a servant-maid clever in beautifully waving their *chauri*-like rows of foam with the palm-like crests of their moving billows; for any one born in which, the goddess Lakshmi, with her round sportive lotus, furnishes a beautiful umbrella of gems over his head ever accustomed to wear a crown; though whose members that were incessantly performing sacrifices are no more, yet the clouds appear like the volumes of smoke from their horse-sacrifies still sticking to the firmament; and, as if in imitation of whose members they (the clouds), fetching water from time to time from the four oceans, pour forth their whole essence for the

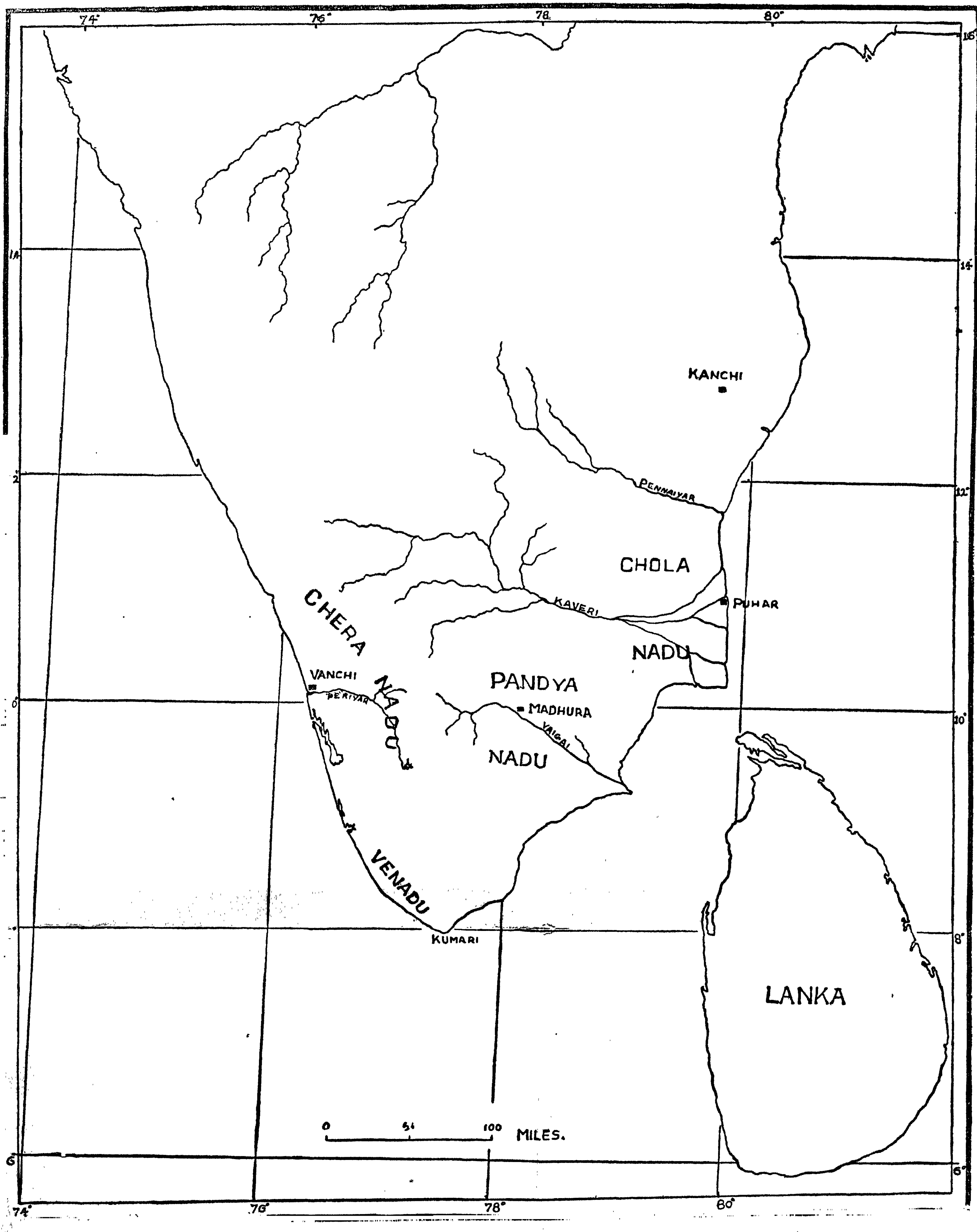
prosperity of the world; may this dynasty of Vrishni kings, shining like *(a jewel of)* pearls. remain at the head of kings as long as *(the sun and moon)* last.

(The incomplete verse is left untranslated).

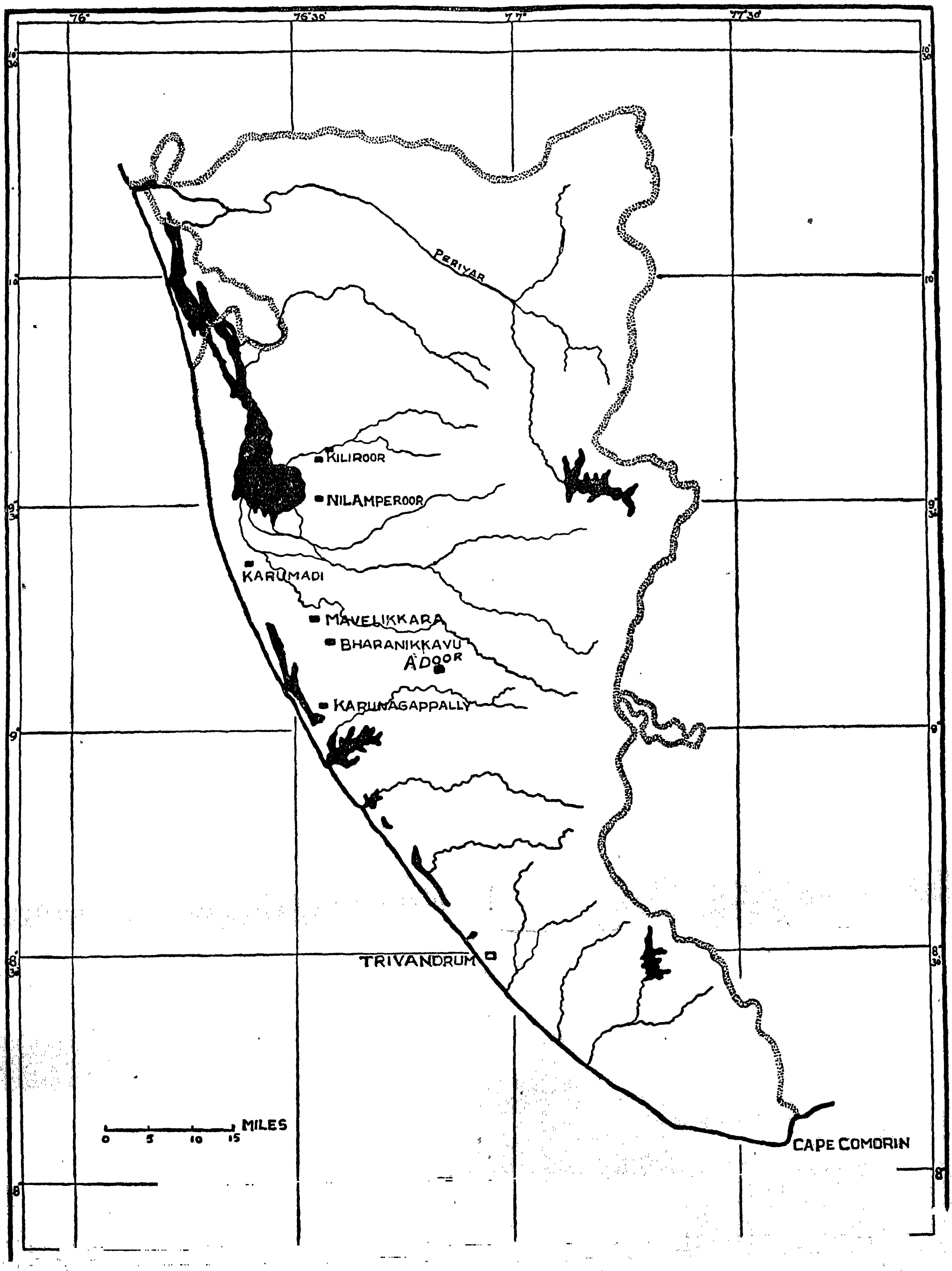
V. 7 — to the end. *When the sun was in Makara, in the month of Pausha, on a Thursday when the moon was in Mrigasira,* he made a grant of land. The boundaries, etc.. on all sides thereof may be seen in the Tamil portion of this document. For its protection was appointed by the king himself Vira-Kota on whose breast Lakshmi, enamoured of victory, is sleeping with his arm for a pillow. To whom it was always, a pleasure to be the object of begging, but who, the friend of devotees was not even in dream, the subject thereof; he, king *Varaguna,* entreats the members of his dynasty as follows:—" This meritorious dynasty of yours should not be ruined." Once again the best of kings, the greatest of Yadava kings, with bowed head entreats all his successors, friends of their devotees, as follows: "This land, like a wife, should be kept at heart and personally safeguarded by you time after time from the possibility of enjoyment by another. O men, hasten your minds to deeds of merit. The god of Death, terrible with mouth wide open, is roaming near awaiting [his] time; and, as if to show him favour, his father, the lord of day, with quick marches, hurriedly leads away the remainder of your lives. Be it well: Sri [na] Go—dvadasi."

[T. A. S. No. XII. PP. 192-193]

INDEX.



MAP OF ANCIENT TAMILAKAM.



MAP OF TRAVANCORE Showing Places Of Buddhistic Importance.

144